IN SEARCH OF ADEQUATE FAITH: RELIGIOUS SKEPTICISM IN GERMAN LETTERS (1750-1800)

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Matthew Thomas Stoltz

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Matthew Thomas Stoltz, PhD

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The following dissertation, "In Search of Adequate Faith: Religious Skepticism in German Letters (1750–1800)," is an interdisciplinary study exploring the religious writings of Klopstock, Lessing, and Novalis. During the mid- to late-eighteenth century the struggle to articulate a distinctly modern faith becomes audible across the literary and aesthetic works of writers who were committed to making the biblical tradition more appealing to an increasingly skeptical age. Rather than driving a wedge between sacred and secular cultures, these writers promised greater spiritual cohesion. Instead of simply yielding to the authority of tradition and scripture, their works strove to articulate more adequate means of forging religious bonds. This study investigates how a number of writers turned the spirit of religion into a weapon, which precipitated a second reformation in the latter half of the eighteenth century. How did literature and aesthetics challenge the authority of the five Lutheran *Solae*? How might they offer more effective strategies for reconciling faith and reason than philosophy and theology? What role did material and visual culture play in mediating religious experience at this time?

To answer these questions, I analyze a constellation of documents associated with each writer. My first chapter interrogates the poetic methodology of Klopstock's *Der Messias* by

exploring his extensive amplification of the New Testament figure Doubting Thomas. In my analysis, Klopstock's poetics inadvertently reproduce Thomas' tragic "mistake" by doubting the efficacy of unaided scripture to communicate religious truth; a doubt that he attempts to resolve by intensifying the reader's affective experience of the gospel narratives. My second chapter argues that Lessing develops a more powerful defense against religious skepticism than Klopstock by appealing to the spirit of religion rather than to the authority of its letter. By reorienting faith around the spirit of religion, Lessing sparks a Copernican turn in religious consciousness that helped emancipate modern believers from theological regimes that had become increasingly normative in their approach to the letter of scripture. My final chapter considers how Novalis confronts the ways in which Lessing and the Protestant tradition deminishes the value of sensible forms of religious mediation by "spiritualizing" modern faith. Unlike Lessing, Novalis insists that revealed knowledge demands material mediation like images and symbols in order to (re)shape and (re)generate religious experience.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Matthew Stoltz received his BA in English Literature and Comparative History of Ideas in 2006 from the University of Washington. From 2007–2009 he continued his education by enrolling in German language courses at the University of Washington and eventually found a temporary home at San Francisco State University's German MA program, which prepared him for Cornell University's German Studies program. Matthew received his MA from Cornell in 2015 and went on to earn his PhD in 2018. In September of 2019 Matthew begins teaching in the Cultures, Civilization and Ideas program at Bilkent University as an Assistant Professor.

To my parents, Arthur and Mary McGuire-Stoltz

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INTRODUCTION

In Search of Adequate Faith: Religious Skepticism in German Letters (1750-1800)

This dissertation has taken on a much larger scope than I initially anticipated. What began as a focused investigation into the ways in which religious poetry indexed a shifting landscape between religious and secular cultures from the mid-to-late eighteenth century, sent me searching for answers in unexpected places. Finding myself immersed in the writings of the Early Church Fathers, the theology of medieval mystic saints, and the polemics of the Reformation, I quickly realized that to gain any insight into how the central figures of this study—Klopstock, Lessing, and Novalis—intervened against the religious traditions and institutions of their day required a much broader outlook. Thus, my project offers close-readings from the works of this constellation of writers and it reflects on their literary and theological contributions from a variety of disciplinary standpoints that include theology, aesthetics, literature, philosophy, art history, hermeneutics, and rhetoric.

To both throw light on what this study is ultimately about and to frame its major arguments and theses, I will begin by closely reading two images that are freighted with a significance running through the following pages. The first (fig. 1), by Heinrich Göding (1531-1606), pinpoints what became the center of the theological universe within Protestant thought all the way up to the mid eighteenth century, namely, the bible. At the heart of Göding's *Mühlberg Altarpiece* (1568) stands

an open bible whose letters appear visibly present yet stubbornly illegible. It was a common trope of sixteenth-century artworks to depict reformers clutching a bible, as if visually capturing the Reformation's core argument that "true" religion is grounded on scripture alone (*sola scriptura*), rather than on a set of inherited traditions and customs that, in the sixteenth century, were increasingly seen to be at odds with the ethical content of scripture. And yet Göding's altarpiece stands out from other reformation artworks for several reasons. In the painting, two ministers, who presumably just read from scripture, stand with their backs to the altar as they perform the sacrament of the eucharist, while a third figure can be seen in the background with his hands piously folded as he appears to gaze upon the bible.[1] In fact, this third figure, as well as the female figure adjacent to him, were recently deceased patrons from the Mühlberg church who commissioned the artwork. So what we actually see are two framed portraits commemorating the lives of these individuals who move from the flanked wings of the triptych into the center of the composition, which implies both their presence (i.e. the memory of the patrons persisting into the world of the painting) and their absence since they no longer participate in the eucharist. Yet more important for this study than the two figures, is the mirror effect or *mise en abyme* that the painting produces. The image represents an infinitely recurring sequence of altars and open bibles that essentializes a self-referential world, which stands averse to new phenomena from entering the scene.[2] Significantly, in the third iteration of the sequence the bible completely vanishes and the

[1] The image included here is actually just the predella of a much larger series of images that compose the entire altarpiece. The reason I include only this part of the altarpiece is because it attempts to depict the "present day" (i.e. sixteenth-century), whereas the other images call back to earlier scenes and events occurring at the times of the old and new testaments. For a full reading of the altar see Koerner, Joseph Leo. *The Reformation of the Image*. University of Chicago Press, 2008. pp. 429-440.

[2] In many ways, Luther embodies this aversion to external forces and novelty. For example, in his polemic against Jerome Emser, Luther expresses an opposition to humanist theologians seeking to

imagination must take over at precisely this moment when painting reaches its formal limitations to fill in a content that appears to be lacking–to imagine the book (or letter) that is no longer visible.

Figure 1: **Heinrich Göding, *Mühlberg Altarpiece* (1568)**

My dissertation explores this vanishing point with respect to the letter of religion during the latter half of the eighteenth century, in which the contents of scripture itself (as opposed to just tradition) began to appear as offensive to popular morality and a general effort to *expand* the biblical tradition becomes discernable across the literary and aesthetic writings of Klopstock, Lessing, and Novalis. From Klopstock's extensive amplification of biblical scenes in his Christian epic *Der Messias* (1748-73), to Lessing's engagement with apocryphal texts and "heretical" figures of the Early Church and Medieval Ages during the Fragmentenstreit (1773–1780), to

amplify the scope of scripture by supplementing it with "human doctrines." In Luther's polemic "Concerning the Letter and the Spirit," written against the humanist theologian Jerome Emser, he writes: "If he [Emser] could at least show where the Holy Spirit teaches too little and where Scripture needs the additions of men, there would be some appearance of reason […] My cause does not need [human additions] because it is well grounded in scripture. [But] yours certainly does, because it is built upon human dreams." Luther, Martin, *Basic Theological Writings*, third edition, ed. Timothy F. Lull and William R. Russell, Minneapolis, 2012. p. 68.

Novalis' optimistic reading of the *spirit* of Church history in *Die Christenheit oder Europa* (1799) each writer (knowingly or unknowingly) seeks to transcend the limitations of the letter by taking recourse to the spirit of religion—making it the primary site of interpretation rather than the letter alone. As a result, these authors helped usher in a participatory regime of faith that insists on developing new interpretations of the spirit of religion rather than blindly obeying the formulas passed down, for example, from Luther's *Der Kleine Katechismus* that attempts to clarify every "Was ist das" [what is that] of scripture with a prescriptive (and definitive) "Das ist" [that is] statement. By 1750, I argue, the letter of religion alone no longer served as a sufficient foundation upon which to rest confessions of faith, and the search for more adequate forms of faith began with attempts to harmonize popular morality and culture with the spirit of religion, which inevitably produced a *new* letter promising to outperform its predecessor(s) that assumed the spirit to be accessible only through rigorous hermeneutic labor.[3] Such efforts broke with older theological paradigms that considered the spirit of religion to be hidden or contained within its letter.[4] Instead, later generations (especially the early German Romantics) came to view the theological concept of spirit in secular, aesthetic, and ethical terms. Whereas Fichte and Kant described the concept of "Geist" in terms of it being an animating principle of the human mind that helps raise inchoate

[3]Johnathan Sheehan's book *The Enlightenment Bible* shows how the translation practices of the eighteenth century were invested in forging an "Enlightenment Bible" through a "sustained and serious engagement with the place of the Bible in the Modern world [which was] produced by a complex set of practices whose most sophisticated instruments were *scholarship*—philological, literary, and historical—and *translation*" (xii). Sheehan, Johnathan. *The Enlightenment Bible: Translation, Scholarship, Culture*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005.

[4] Henri de Lubac describes these earlier traditions in his book *Medieval Exegesis*, claiming that the Pauline tradition "seeks the spirit in the letter, [which] is thought to result from a Platonic prejudice that makes the body the prison house of the soul" (xiv). Lubac, Henri de. *Medieval Exegesis: The Four Senses of Scripture, Vol. 1*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998.

feelings and intuitions to a higher level of consciousness, thereby conferring the labor of revelation to the *human* spirit, Lessing, by contrast, understood the "Geist" of religion to refer to its ethical content (i.e. the "inner truth" of scripture) that the letter could never fully express.

Before moving to the next image, however, the foreground and background of Göding's image requires further attention. At the foot of the altar are thatches of grass and just to the right, standing behind the altar, a tree emerges, two details that essentialize Luther's pronouncement that Christianity can exist "wherever the word is preached and heard."[5] Yet, a more radical reading of these details is possible, for they also anticipate the desire for religion to move out into nature, leaving behind the traditional walls of the church and allowing for greater freedom with respect to how religious experience can be occasioned. In one of their most direct confrontations, Lessing criticized Klopstock and his disciples from the moral weekly *Nordischer Aufseher*[6] for assuming "dass man ohne Religion kein rechtschaffener Mann sein könne"[7] [that one cannot be a morally upstanding person without religion]. Against the idea that religion is the ultimate source of all moral life Lessing argues: "Man kann sich einer Sophisterei schuldig machen, ohne ein Sophist zu sein; so wie man eine Unwahrheit kann gesagt haben, ohne darum ein Lügner zu sein; so wie man sich betrinken kann, ohne darum ein Trunkenbold zu sein"[8] [One can be guilty of a sophistry without being a sophist; just as one may have spoken something untrue without being a liar; just as one can get drunk without being a drunkard]. Even though religion may ideally help cultivate moral life, according to Lessing's humorous response, it would be absurd to believe that morality

[5] Luther, Martin. *The Complete Sermons of Martin Luther*. Vol., 3. Ed. John Nicholas Lenker & Eugene F. A. Klug. Grand Rapids Michigan: Baker Books, 2000. p. 238.
[6] Here I am referring to the editors of the Johann Bernhard Basedow (1724-1790) and Johann Andreas Cramer (1723-1788)
[7] Lessing, Gotthold Ephraim. *Briefe die Neueste Literatur betreffend*. Stuttgart: Reclam, 1987. Letter XXI, May 22, 1760. English translation mine.
[8] Ibid, letter XXI, May 22, 1760.

cannot be expressed by individuals independent of their belonging to a religious congregation. Novalis also becomes a figure of this study who exhibits a desire to dissolve distinctions that only insulate the biblical tradition from supossedly "external" discourses like poetry, which he thought could help revitalize religion for the modern world. For instance, in his *Fragmente und Studien* from 1799, he writes "Über die heilige Geschichte überhaupt—ihre Poësie, ihre innre Evidenz. Wer hat die Bibel für geschlossen erklärt? Sollte die Bibel nicht noch im Wachsen begriffen seyn? Der Biblische Vortrag ist unendlich bunt—Geschichte, Poësie, alles durcheinander"[9] [About biblical history in general, its poetry, its inner evidence. Who declared the Bible closed? Should not the Bible still be growing? Biblical discourse is infinitely colorful: history, poetry, all mixed up]. Novalis was confident that, in showing how poetry and biblical history were intimately related, he could assuage the skeptical objections raised by a previous generation of Aufklärer [enlightenment thinkers]. Furthermore, Novalis often uses the term "Religiosität" [religiosity] in his writings, which opens up the door to a more fluid conception of religious experience that refuses to limit itself to prescribed forms of worship. One outcome of this change in perspectives was that the line between religious and aesthetic experience began to dissolve, which becomes observable in the works of other Romantics like Wilhelm Heinrich Wackenroder (1773-1798), whose writings suggest that the value of a religious experience should be based on how much aesthetic pleasure it affords a "believer."[10]

The next image (fig. 2), also from the sixteenth century, exposes a tendency within Protestant theology that would eventually become a major source of controversy by the 1770s,

[9] Novalis. *Werke, Tagebücher und Briefe Friedrich von Hardenbergs*. Hrsg. von Hans-Joachim Mähl und Richard Samuel. Carl Hanser Verlag: München, 2005. Band II, no. 97. p. 766. English translation mine.
[10] Wackenroder, Wilhelm Heinrich. *Herzensergiessungen eines kunstliebenden Klosterbruders*. Stuttgart: Reclam, 1964.

namely, its fetishization of the "Buchstabe" [letter] of religion. The image, entitled *Augsburg Confession* (1590), commemorates Charles V's signing of the Augsburg peace treaty. In this socially stratified scene, emperor Charles V (the largest represented figure) can be found at the center of the composition. His signing of the treaty granted local princes the authority to decide which system of faith—Catholicism or Protestantism—their region wished to officially recognize. Of interest to this study is less the complex historical nuances of this particular event and more the details of the painting itself, which depicts the figures assembled at the center as arguing over the meaning of the words on their respective bibles, all looking to persuade the emperor that their interpretation is more correct. That these central figures appear to be debating is made evident by the fact that not everyone's hand is raised to show the sign of benediction, a gesture used to give someone your blessing but whose etymology also means "well spoken"—as though some members of the group remained unmoved by a rival's interpretation of the text. Off to the right just under the crucifix, one encounters yet another scene in which clerical figures appear engaged in a dispute over the words of scripture. Details like these speak not only to the newly developed schism that divided the Church into Protestant and Catholic sects, but they also anticipate the attempt by enlightenment theologians to build an entirely coherent system of faith (i.e. a science of religion)[11] founded on nothing but historical "facts" that help support a "correct" interpretation of scripture, an effort that both Lessing and Novalis criticize for transforming faith into a matter of hermeneutics rather than moral education. The painting, which is saturated with words that attempt to explain every visual detail, also exhibits a hostility towards other religious phenomena from communicating autonomously. This aspect of the painting suggests that the word has a

[11] In chapter 2, section 3 of the following study I discuss enlightenment theology's desire to forge a science of religion chiefly through the work of Siegmund Baumgarten, the older brother of Alexander Baumgarten.

powerful function: it is there to intervene whenever doubts emerge. And yet, using the word to pre-emptively strike against any possible doubts comes at the cost of not allowing viewers to arrive at an understanding on their own terms. It eschews the very process of (self) discovery that will come to define what I call "modern" faith.

Figure 2: Anonymous, *Augsburg Confession* (1590)

This study contributes to larger debates about the continued relevance of God and religion in secular culture. It demonstrates that, rather than surrendering to religious skepticism, both Enlightenment and Romantic writers hastened to use aesthetics and literature to build more fluid conceptions of faith that can accommodate the changing spiritual needs of modernity. Specifically, aesthetics and literature help break apart a tradition of faith oriented around duty by coordinating newly emergent discourses into religious thought and practice. For example, the discourse on freedom that became central to many philosophical treatises across the eighteenth century had to

contend with the longstanding theological doctrine of grace, which accorded human freedom little, if any, role in achieving salvation. What is unique to this research is that it considers confrontations like this from the standpoint of literature and aesthetics rather than solely through the lens of philosophy and theology. To mention only one recent example, John Smith's book *Dialogues between Faith and Reason*—while offering extremely insightful readings into how canonical figures negotiated their religious beliefs in a highly skeptical age—limits itself to a dialogue between philosophy and theology. My work attempts to bring literature and aesthetics into that dialogue by showing how it became fully conversant in the problems and questions that occupied philosophy and theology. Additionally, my research challenges the assumption that secular literature is simply a hostile "other" seeking to supplant religion in the eighteenth century. Against this view, my research recovers the dialogical negotiations between faith and reason that were staged across the literary and aesthetic writings of the period, which, I claim, developed alongside religious discourse rather than counter to it. Far from simply "replacing" religion, literature and aesthetics, I argue, help to usher in new configurations of spiritual life that promise to modernize faith by unmooring it from duty-based paradigms of belief.

As I mentioned, the two paintings above allude to many of the questions I pursue in this dissertation, yet my actual point of departure begins with the figure of Doubting Thomas in Klopstock's *Der Messias*. For his persistent skepticism and refusal to believe without visual proof of Christ's resurrection in the Gospel of John, Doubting Thomas can easily be thought of as the patron saint of enlightenment theology, which also desired more powerful evidence to justify its faith in Christianity. Indeed, as I will show, the problem of Doubting Thomas is restaged in all three authors of this study in some fashion. In my first chapter, I interrogate Klopstock's essay "Von der heiligen Poesie" in which he appears to fall in line with the Lutheran tradition by

attempting to maintain (ostensibly) the integrity of the letter; claiming to merely "walk in the footsteps of scripture" by filling in a few missing details here and there—as if he were an apprentice painter tasked only with bringing the master's work into a final state of completion. After an analysis of Klopstock's poetics, I then conduct a close reading of his amplification of Doubting Thomas in Gesang [book] XIV of *Der Messias* and conclude that his poetics inadvertently reproduces Thomas' "tragic" flaw by doubting the efficacy of unaided scripture to communicate religious truths. The underlying assumption of Klopstock's poetics is that without the help of poetry, religious truths like the one Christ communicates to Thomas in the Gospel of John (i.e. "it is better to believe than to see"[12]) would not reach modern audiences. In addition to constellating Klopstock's poetics with his representation of Doubting Thomas in *Der Messias*, I use this chapter to show how his poetics were in dialogue with the methodological practices of the so-called Neologen or "new theologians" (c.1740-1780), who developed a historical-critical approach to the biblical tradition that promised to transform older doctrines and dogmas so that they were less offensive to popular morality. The Neologen, who I treat more systematically in Chapter 2 (sections 1 & 3), accomplished this through several different strategies, but chief among them was a form of paraphrastics that allowed them to empty out the offensive historical content of revelation and refill it with rational content.[13] While Klopstock was more interested in conjugating scripture into the idiom of affect poetry than he was in "rationalizing" its contents,[14]

[12] See John 20:29.

[13] One of the best studies on the Neologen remains Karl Aner's *Die Theologie der Lessingzeit* (1929). Aner claims, "Der Inhalt, von dem die Neologie den Offenbarungsbegriff entleert, ist der historische; der Inhalt, den sie neu einfüllt, ein rationaler" [The content that neology empties out from the concept of revelation is historical; the content that it refills it with is rational] (4). English translation mine.

[14]The clearest expression of Klopstock's aversion to rationalizing the content of scripture or reducing its contents to moral precepts can be found in his "Von der besten Art über Gott zu denken," in which he argues that the best mode in which to "think about God" is not a "cold" metaphysical one, but rather through a poetic mode.

he was nevertheless drawn to the kind of paraphrastics that the Neologen were engaged in. Like the Neologen, Klopstock's epic poem interprets historical events in an idealized way in order to express an ethos that was more commensurate to the customs and traditions of the mid-eighteenth century.

My second chapter explores how Lessing develops a more substantive response to religious skepticism than his predecessors by introducing an aesthetic mode of thinking that welcomes a participatory regime of faith. Lessing's reorientation of Protestantism around the spirit rather than letter of the bible, sparks, I argue, a Copernican turn in Protestant consciousness that authenticates religious experience through the active criticism of the biblical tradition rather than a passive duty to believe [Glaubenspflicht]. The Fragmentenstreit also contains its own Doubting Thomas moment as soon as Lessing begins to critique enlightenment theology for investing historical evidence with more epistemic power than it has to offer. For Lessing, historical truth is always firmly rooted in the particular and can never rise to the status of a general truth of reason. Like Thomas, the eighteenth century must also trust in the witness testimony of biblical history and settle for a form of knowledge that is mediated rather than immediate. That history is mediated, however, does not pose any serious threat to modern faith. According to Lessing, the stories of the bible can still have an *immediate effect* on their audience, and this contributes to a "spiritual proof," which suggest that confessions of faith need not rest on the logos of scripture, but instead on its ethos. This chapter begins with a general introduction into the historical context of the Fragmentenstreit, pointing to its prehistory and also to its reception up through Kierkegaard. I then explore how the aesthetic logic of Lessing's *Laokoon* finds expression in later theological

concepts like his "Fingerzeig" [pointer], which "weder ganz verhüllt noch ganz entdeckt"[15] [neither wholly conceals nor wholly reveals] its speculative vision. I am especially interested in how his concept of the "pregnant moment" offers a useful heuristic for understanding how the visible, or outward, "letter" of religion interacts with the invisible "spirit" in Lessing's religious thought. After discussing the theological relevance of his *Laokoon*, I then consider the three main theological systems that become an object of criticism for Lessing and also include an excursus into pietism and how Lessing stands within that tradition. The next two sections explore more systematically the negative and positive moments of Lessing's theology, starting with how his critique of the letter of religion left him searching for a cataphatic theology that he eventually locates in the spirit of religion.

My final chapter explores how Novalis critiques Lessing by recuperating the miracles, signs, and intuitions that Lessing's *Erziehung* dispensed with. By mobilizing intuitive forms of language like fairytales to express religious truth, Novalis makes room for a model of faith that engages the senses. In my analysis, Lessing's preference to discursively grasp the world around him was not shared by Novalis, whose writings exhibit an eagerness to spar with his predecessor by developing a theory of religious education that seeks to redeem the "outside" for its role in mediating spiritual life. Whereas, Lessing finds sensible forms of religious experience (i.e. images, miracles, prophecies) to be unnecessary props for modern faith (i.e. something to grow out of once a certain age of "maturity" is reached), Novalis believes they are the future of religion—that without religious phenomena modernity will never regain its lost "*sense* for religion." In many ways, Novalis stands with Doubting Thomas by demanding that religion be visible rather than

[15]Lessing, Gotthold Ephraim. *Werke und Briefe: In Zwölf Bänden*. Band 10. Hrsg. Von Arno Schilson und Axel Schmitt. Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1985. p. 74.

invisible, and his *Die Christenheit oder Europa* develops a nostalgic image of the Medieval world to show how outward forms of Christian life contributed to a peaceful cosmopolitan order that was only interrupted once the Reformation relativized all religious life to the standpoint of philology. By framing his *Die Christenheit oder Europa* as a kind of fairy tale sermon, Novalis displays more honesty than Klopstock with respect to how his poetry engages the letter of religion. In fact, Novalis explicitly criticizes Klopstock in one of his fragments for being an "unpoetic philologist," writing that "Klopstocks Werke scheinen größentheils freie Übersetzungen und Bearbeitungen eines unbekannten Dichters durch einen sehr talentvollen, aber unpoetischen Philologen, zu sein"[16] [Klopstock's works largely appear to be free translations and adaptations of an unknown poet by a very talented but unpoetic philologist.] In other words, Klopstock was too preoccupied with preserving the letter of scripture, busied himself too much with the metrical composition of his verse to produce true works of genius. This chapter begins with an investigation into several theoretical concepts—above all his concept of a "geistige Gegenwart" [spiritual present]—that become relevant for discussing Novalis' religious thought, and then I use the opening scene from *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* to show how Novalis was engaged in a polemical debate with Lessing over the status of images in his theory of religious education. I conclude this chapter with a close comparative reading of Novalis' *Die Christenheit oder Europa* and Lessing's *Erziehung*.

[16] Novalis. *Werke, Tagebücher und Briefe Friedrich von Hardenbergs*. Hrsg. von Hans-Joachim Mähl und Richard Samuel. Carl Hanser Verlag: München, 2005. Band II, no. 97. p. 766. English translation mine.

CHAPTER ONE

Doubting Klopstock: The Problem of Thomas in *Der Messias*

I. Heilige Poesie as a Poetics of Skepticism

> "Der Freigeist, und der Christ, der seine Religion nur halb versteht, sehn da [in der Offenbarung] nur einen großen Schauplatz von Trümmern, wo der tiefsinnige Christ einen majestätischen Tempel sieht."[17]
>
> [The free spirit, and the Christian who only half understands his religion, sees in scripture only a great scene of ruins, where the profound Christian sees a majestic temple.]
>
> —Klopstock, Von der heiligen Poesie, 1755

Thomas, the New Testament figure famously known for refusing to believe in Christ's resurrection without empirical evidence, was almost written out of the canon by the synoptic

[17] Friedrich Gottlieb Klopstock, "Von der heiligen Poesie," in *Klopstocks Sämmtliche Werke*, vol. 10 Leipzig: Göschen, 1854–55, pp. 237–38. Unless otherwise indicated all English translations of Klopstock's writings are mine.

tradition (the Gospels of Mark, Luke, and Matthew[18]). These texts, which represent the earliest and most consistent reports of Christ's life and teachings, only mention his name as one minor figure among a list of others,[19] and instead of concentrating doubts about Christ's resurrection in him they develop it in radically different ways. For example, the Gospel of Mark inadvertently led to the grave-robbing theory in which Christ's body was stolen rather than resurrected;[20] Luke's Gospel left open the possibility that the grief-stricken apostles were delusional and saw only a

[18] Much of what we know of Thomas actually comes from outside the canon, in gnostic literature. The most significant texts are: *The Infancy Gospel of Thomas*, which documents the miracles performed by Christ when he was a child; *The Gospel of Thomas*, which is another gospel said to be composed by Thomas; *The Book of Thomas the Contender*, a collection of stories that record Christ's teachings; *The Acts of Thomas*, which document his missionary work in India; and *The Apocalypse of Thomas*, which reports on Christ's views about the end of the world. All of these sources can be found together in *The New Testament Apocrypha: A Collection of Apocryphal Christian Literature*, trans. J.K. Elliot, Oxford, 2009.

[19] All biblical references are from *The Bible.* The New Oxford Annotated Version, 3rd ed., Oxford UP, 2001. See Mark 3:18; Luke 6:15; Matthew 10:3. Glenn Most makes a similar claim: "It is almost as though the canonization of the New Testament was achieved, in part at least, by systematically excluding Thomas." Most, W. Glenn, *Doubting Thomas*, Cambridge, Mass. 2005, p. 90.

[20] In the Gospel of Mark an unidentified youth (not an angel) sits at the empty tomb and tells a group of female mourners that Christ "has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him" (16:6). The youth instructs the women to tell the other apostles of Christ's resurrection, but instead they "fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid" (16:8). In the original ending (as opposed to the shorter and longer endings of Mark added later in the second century) nobody actually sees Christ, which leads to the more likely scenario that Christ's body was stolen and the author fabricated the resurrection to legitimize the authority of the Church. The grave-robbing theory was renewed in the eighteenth century by Samuel Herman Reimarus (1694–1768) in his essay "Über die Auferstehungsgeschichte" (1777), published posthumously during the fragment controversy (1773–80) by Lessing. Reimarus used the Gospel of Matthew to reinforce the theory, identifying the gardener of the story as Joseph of Arimathea, the person responsible for Christ's burial: "Es war ganz möglich, daß der Körper Jesu des Nachts heimlich aus dem Grabe gestohlen, und anderwärts verscharret werden konnte. Das Grab war in einem Fels, gehörte dem Joseph von Arimathia, einem heimlichen Jünger Jesu, und der Zugang zum Grabe war in dem Gehege seines Gartens" [It was entirely possible that the body of Jesus could have been stolen secretly out of the tomb at night and buried elsewhere. The tomb was in a rock, it belonged to Joseph of Arimathea, a secret disciple of Jesus, and the entrance to the tomb was in the enclosure of his garden.] In: Lessing, Gotthold Ephraim, *Werke und Briefe*, Band 8, hrsg. von Arno Schilson, Frankfurt am Main, Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1989, p. 283. English translation mine.

ghost of Christ;[21] lastly, the Gospel of Matthew communalized the problem of doubt by explicitly stating that there were "still doubters among" the apostles even after they saw the risen Christ at Galilee.[22] But only the Gospel of John—a text composed much later than the other gospels—decided to flesh out the figure of Thomas and give him a lead role. In this version of the story, Thomas was given the ambitious task of sweeping away the residual skepticism left over from the three previous gospels.[23] The clearest expression of what is at stake if doubts about Christ's resurrection prevail was articulated by Paul, who, in trying to persuade the Corinthians of the story, wrote: "if the dead are not raised, let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die."[24] In other words, if there is no resurrection, which by extension means no eternal salvation, then hedonism offers a more relevant ethos than Christianity. John was acutely aware of this and summoned all his talents as a storyteller to put Thomas's disbelief into the service of faith so that posterity would never forget the proverb "it is better to believe than to see."[25] However, posterity does not remember "Believing Thomas,"[26] but rather "Doubting Thomas," the apostle who refused to ground his faith

[21] In the Gospel of Luke Christ actually appears to two apostles, and their reaction is telling: "They were startled and terrified, and thought that they were seeing a ghost" (24:37). Jesus becomes insecure about their reaction and asks, "why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself. Touch me and see; for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have" (24:38–39). But, according to Luke, the apostles still doubted: "While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering […]" (24:41). In an attempt to further prove the material existence of his risen body, Christ offers to eat food to demonstrate that he is no mere apparition: "have you anything here to eat? They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate it in their presence" (24:41–43).

[22] See Matthew 28:17: "And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted."

[23] See Most, pp. 27–28: "all three of the synoptic Gospels make great efforts to leave us with faith, but the very means they employ cannot help but leave us with questions. In the Gospel of John, all the issues of doubt and belief that, in different ways, haunt the three synoptic Gospels converge to form an unsettling climax [and] the various strands of the whole discourse of doubt and conviction are intertwined into the texture of a single character [i.e., Thomas]."

[24] See Paul, I Corinthians 15:32.

[25] See John 20:29.

[26] See John 20:28 for Thomas's proclamation of faith, where after seeing the wounds he says to Christ:

on hearsay alone; the one who demanded to see and touch the wounds of Christ for himself[27]—a demand that would shroud his reception throughout cultural history in ambiguity.[28] That ambiguity ensured that John would not get the last word with respect to the Thomas story.

Looking ahead to the eighteenth century, the problem of Doubting Thomas would be restaged in a number of powerful ways.[29] More so than any other apostle, Thomas lives up to Kant's "motto of the enlightenment" insofar as he exhibits the courage to use his own

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"My lord and my God." This response marks the only occasion in the New Testament Gospels where Christ is explicitly referred to as God. Earlier in John (20:15), Mary Magdalene mistakes the gardener for Christ; an intertextual reference that calls back to Genesis and suggestively elevates Christ to the status of Creator. Most, pp. 27–28, suggests that Thomas refers to Christ as God because Christ singled him out to honor his request to see and touch the wounds. Martin Buber indicates that John's version of Thomas proclaims a faith that transcends the faith of the other apostles, and uses this moment in the Gospel of John to further distinguish between a Jewish "type" of faith (i.e., the faith of Abraham) and a Christian one: "But [Thomas] does not only believe that Jesus is risen; he believes also that he is ›his God.‹ Did the other apostles also believe that? Till then they have not said anything which might be so understood […] What [Thomas] thinks in this moment is apparent: since no man can rise as an individual, then this is no man, but a god." See Buber, Martin, *Two Types of Faith*, trans. Norman P. Goldhawk, New York: Syracuse University Press, 2003, p. 128.

[27] See John 20:25 "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe."

[28] For a survey on how Thomas was treated by theologians from the Early Church up to the counter-reformation see Most, pp. 122–54.

[29] To my knowledge there is no secondary literature that specifically uses Thomas as a crucible for analyzing the development of the religious enlightenment. Kevin Hilliard briefly discusses the figure of Thomas in Klopstock's *Messias*, though he subsumes Thomas's relevance under the discourse of "freethinking" and does not venture a comparison between the underlying poetics of *Der Messias* and the figure of Thomas as I do here (Hilliard, Kevin, *Freethinkers, Libertines and Schwärmer: Heterodoxy in German Literature, 1750–1800*, London: IGRS Books, 2011). In Hilliard's analysis, "Klopstock used the [Thomas] episode in a way that is both orthodox and exegetically conventional" (pp. 63–68), though I would argue that the magnitude of Klopstock's amplification of Thomas rules out the possibility of an "orthodox" reading, by taking liberties that are incompatible with the orthodox doctrine of *sola scriptura*. See also Hilliard, Kevin, *Philosophy, Letters, and the Fine Arts in Klopstock's Thought*, London 1987, pp. 68–113. Steffen Martus analyzes Klopstock's version of Doubting Thomas, but limits his investigation to showing how the Thomas scenes establish an environment of "critical communication," which puts the reader into the position of an apostle or disciple and Klopstock into the position of a Messiah. See Martus, Steffen, *Werkpolitik. Zur Literaturgeschichte kritischer Kommunikation vom 17. bis ins 20. Jahrhundert*, Berlin 2007, pp. 279–81.

understanding by not blindly assenting to the authority of others.[30] For Thomas does not merely *think* that eternal salvation awaits humanity, he *knows* it.[31] His religious knowledge is constitutive rather than regulative,[32] which means that he does not need to think and act *as if* God exists and will reward the virtuous because he has seen the promise fulfilled in Christ.[33] Of course, no such faith was available to enlightenment theologians,[34] who nevertheless defiantly strove to forge systems of faith that were consonant with the newly minted natural-scientific method.[35] Their

[30] On Kant's "motto of enlightenment," see Kant, Immanuel, "Beantwortung der Frage: Was ist Aufklärung?," in *Schriften zur Anthropologie, Geschichtsphilosophie, Politik und Pädagogik 1*, Band XI, Hrsg. von. Wilhelm Weischedel, Frankfurt am Main 2014, p. 53.
[31] On the distinction between thinking (denken) and knowing (erkennen), see Kant, Immanuel, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft I*, Band III, Hrsg. von Wilhelm Weischedel, Berlin 2014, p. 30.
[32] On Kant's distinction between knowledge that is regulative and constitutive see Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft I*, p. 219.
[33] On Kant's moral proof of God, see Kant, Immanuel, *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft. Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten*, Band VII. Hrsg. von Wilhelm Weischedel, Berlin 2014, p. 51. For the aesthetic underpinnings of Kant's moral proof, see Kant, Immanuel, *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, Band X. Hrsg. von Wilhelm Weischedel, Frankfurt am Main 2015, p. 420. On the relation between aesthetics and religion in Kant's works, see Smith, John H., *Dialogues Between Faith and Reason. The Death and Return of God in Modern German Thought*, Ithaca NY 2011, pp. 68–94.
[34] The best source on Neologie is Karl Aner, whose book *Die Theologie der Lessingzeit* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1927) continues to be a valuable resource for scholars like Henry Allison (*Lessing and the Enlightenment: His Philosophy of Religion and its Relation to Eighteenth-Century Thought*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1966) and Gerhard Kaiser (*Klopstock: Religion und Dichtung*, Gütersloh, 1963). For sources on Deism, see Lucci, Diego, *Scripture and Deism. The Biblical Criticism of the Eighteenth-Century British Deists*, Bern: Peter Lang, 2008, and Gay, Peter, *Deism: An Anthology*, Michigan: Van Nostrand Press, 1968. For sources on Orthodox Lutheranism during the enlightenment, see Sorkin, David, "Reclaiming Theology for the Enlightenment: The Case of Siegmund Jacob Baumgarten," *Central European History*, Vol. 36, No. 4, 2003, pp. 503–30, and *The Religious Enlightenment. Protestants, Jews, and Catholics from London to Vienna*, Princeton, NJ, 2008. Gadamer, Hans-Georg, *Wahrheit und Methode*, Tübingen, 1960 offers excellent readings of pietism during the enlightenment. For a source on Judaism and enlightenment, see Goestchel, Willi, *The Discipline of Philosophy and the Invention of Modern Jewish Thought*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2013.
[35] One early attempt to apply the natural-scientific method to biblical exegesis is Spinoza's *Theological-Political Treatise*. He writes: "The [correct] method of interpreting nature consists above all in constructing a natural history, from which we derive the definitions of natural things, as from certain data. Likewise, to interpret Scripture, we need to assemble a genuine history of it and to deduce the thinking of the Bible's authors by valid inferences from this history, as from certain data and principles." See Spinoza, Benedict de, *Theological-Political Treatise*, trans. Michael Silverthorne and Jonathan Israel, New York 2007, p. 98. For a more general account of the translation and exegetical practices of

efforts to establish a more certain faith implicitly indexed the figure of Doubting Thomas, and many of their methodologies would not be called into question until the Fragmentenstreit. By publishing the fragments of Samuel Herman Reimarus (1694–1768) Lessing held up a mirror to theologians and showed them how their hermeneutics turned scripture into a Tower of Babel,[36] and how the desire to deduce necessary truths of reason from the gospels only renewed the problem of Doubting Thomas in the realm of historical judgment.[37] Rather than confessing its faith upon the logos of the letter, Lessing recommended modernity look for evidence in the spirit of religion (i.e., the underlying ethos embedded in the stories themselves).[38]

Yet before these inquiries turned Thomas into a figure of grounded knowledge, Klopstock attempted to succeed where John had failed. In his Christian epic *Der Messias*, Klopstock conjugates the story of Thomas into the idiom of epic poetry in the hopes of making the moral lesson of belief more communicable to an increasingly skeptical, enlightened age. However, at least one moment in the epic poem threatens to unravel the pious intentions of its poetics: Doubting

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eighteenth-century Germany and England, see Sheenan, Jonathan, *The Enlightenment Bible: Translation, Scholarship, Culture*, Princeton 2005.

[36] See § 51 in Lessing's *Gegensätze des Herausgebers*, in which he allegorizes the state of modern theology through the figure of the child, writing: "Man muß die Anspielungen und Fingerzeige zu viel suchen und machen, die Allegorien zu genau ausschütteln, die Beispiele zu umständlich deuten die Worte zu stark pressen. Das gibt dem Kinde einen kleinlichen, schiefen, spitzfindigen Verstand; das macht es geheimnisreich, abergläubisch, voll Verachtung gegen alles Faßliche und Leichte." [One must look for and invent too many allusions and pointers, extract too much from the allegories, interpret the examples too circumstantially, and press the words too hard. This gives the child a petty, warped, and hairsplitting understanding; it makes the child secretive, superstitious, and full of contempt for everything comprehensible and straightforward.] Lessing, *Werke und Briefe*, Band 8, hrsg. von Arno Schilson, Frankfurt am Main, Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1989, p. 346.

[37] See Lessing's *Über den Beweis des Geistes und der Kraft*. Ibid., p. 440.

[38] See Lessing's *Über den Beweis des Geistes und der Kraft*: "Was verbindet mich denn dazu (Glauben an Christi)?—Nichts, als diese Lehren selbst […] Was kümmert es mich, ob die Sage falsch oder wahr ist: die Früchte sind trefflich." [What, then, binds me to my faith? - Nothing but the teachings themselves … What does it matter to me whether the old legend is true or false? The fruits are excellent.] Ibid., p. 444.

Thomas.[39] Whereas John's exposition of Thomas involves only a few lines of verse,[40] Klopstock expands the tale of incredulity to a staggering 1,400 lines—nearly all of Gesang XIV.[41] Such a prolix adaptation of the Thomas scene demonstrates that Klopstock had very little trust in the revelatory power of the original story; that he found its truth too weak, too soft-spoken, too full of gaps to be of any service to the modern reader. As a result, he tried to supplement the original story by dramatizing the affects associated with skepticism, but in so doing created new gaps and new discrepancies that only intensify the ambiguity of the original story. To be clear, my intention is not to condemn or justify the Thomas of *Der Messias* or its author. Rather, I hope to reconstruct the theological and aesthetic difficulties that Klopstock must have confronted as he wrote his epic poem. In what follows, I will argue that the poetics of *Der Messias* reproduces the same tragic flaw as Thomas by doubting the efficacy of unaided scripture to reveal religious truths. In my analysis, Klopstock's amplification of the figure of Doubting Thomas produces new ambiguities that undermine his general effort to clarify the status of skepticism within the Christian imaginary. To support this argument I explore Klopstock's methodological approach to scripture as outlined in his 1755 essay "Von der heiligen Poesie," though occasionally I refer to his other aesthetic writings as well. After identifying how Klopstock's poetics are circumscribed by skepticism, I

[39] Kaiser, Gerhard, *Klopstock. Religion und Dichtung*, Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1963, p. 9. For further scholarship on this topic, see Jacob, Joachim, *Heilige Poesie: Zu einem literarischen Modell bei Pyra, Klopstock und Wieland*, Tübingen 1997; Osterkamp, Ernst, "Friedrich Gottlieb Klopstock: Der Messias, Der Teufel in der Aufklärung: Vernunftgebot und Entdämonisierung," in: *Lucifer. Stationen eines Motifs*, Berlin 1979, pp. 131–79; Freivogel, Max, *Klopstock. Der heilige Dichter*, Bern: Francke, 1954.
[40] In addition to John 20:25 (cited above), there are only three other occasions where Thomas is given voice in the New Testament. See John 11:16; John 14:5, and John 20:28.
[41] Thomas also appears in Gesänge 3 and 17. See Klopstock, Friedrich Gottlieb, *Der Messias*, in *Werke und Briefe: Historisch-Kritische Ausgabe*, Band 1/2 Hrsg. von Horst Gronemeyer, Elisabeth Höpker-Herberg, Berlin 2000 (Gesang III/V. 263–72, pp. 51–52; Gesang XVII/ V. 1–85, pp. 192–94).

develop a close reading of Klopstock's version of Thomas and identify the politics standing behind his adaptation.

Most orthodox readings of Doubting Thomas tend to limit his significance to that of a negative example.[42] In defending this view, commentators frequently cite Christ's assessment of Thomas's faith: "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet believed."[43] Early commentators like Augustine and Tertullian, for example, used this scene to mark out the limits of human reason, claiming that to grasp the miracles and prophecies of revelation required faith rather than reason.[44] However, by the mid to late eighteenth-century new discourses on freedom had been absorbed into popular morality, greatly diminishing the legitimacy of the obedience model of faith (Glaubenspflicht).[45] As a result, older dogmas needed to be updated to fit the new environment of the enlightenment. For example, Johann August Eberhard (1739–1809) challenged a number of dogmas associated with Christian soteriology, especially those relating to predestination and grace, which tended to credit God with any

[42] See Most, p.145: "the orthodox exegesis sees in Thomas the proof that we should not try too hard to understand and should be prepared to believe even without understanding." Most provides a detailed account of how a "standard" reading of Thomas developed in orthodox traditions, citing five exegetical tropes that were used to consolidate Thomas's significance.

[43] See John 20:29.

[44] Of the resurrection, Tertullian writes "it is certain because it is impossible," and Augustine writes: "where reason fails, that is where faith is constructed." Quoted from Most, pp. 144–45.

[45] For example, in his *Die Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der bloßen Vernunft* (1793) Kant describes compulsory regimes of faith as being "fetish-faiths": "Wenn das [Pfaffentum] die gehorsame Unterwerfung unter eine Satzung, als Frondienst, nicht aber die freie Huldigung auferlegt, die dem moralischen Gesetze zuoberst geleistet werden soll, so mögen der auferlegten Observanzen noch so wenig sein, genug, wenn sie für unbedingt notwendig erklärt werden: so ist das immer ein Fetischglauben, durch den die Menge regiert, und durch den Gehorsam unter eine Kirche (nicht der Religion) ihrer moralischen Freiheit beraubt wird." [If [clericalism] imposes obedient submission to rules, in the form of compulsory labor, but not free homage, to be given above all to the moral law, however few the imposed observances may be, it is enough that they are declared necessary: then that is always a fetish-faith, through which the masses are ruled and robbed of their moral freedom by obedience to a church (not to religion).] See Kant, Immanuel, *Sämmtliche Werke*, Vol. 6, Hrsg. von G. Hartenstein, Leipzig 1868, p. 279.

instantiation of virtuous life in the world rather than attributing it to the freedom of the will. To dignify the moral labor of humanity, Eberhard attempted to naturalize the effects of God's grace, arguing that all moral good arises naturally in the soul of mankind and that there are no supernatural events that determine this person will be virtuous while another sinful[46]. Eberhard also attacked dogmas about eternal damnation that fail to acknowledge the corrective function of punishment. That a human "soul" could spend eternity in hell for a sin undermines the idea of redemption and calls into question God's assumed benevolence. To solve this problem, Eberhard developed a similar solution in which heaven and hell are relativized to the standpoint of mental states, making redemption and punishment a matter of free will.

Ambiguous scenes like the one involving Doubting Thomas incentivized Klopstock to retell the passion story. In his essay *Von der heiligen Poesie*, which served as the preface to the 1756 edition of *Der Messias*, Klopstock expressed his intention to amplify biblical scenes lacking sufficient details and circumstances to make the moral truths of the bible more audible:

> Die moralische Wahrheit der Bibel, besonders da, wo sie eine Stufe höher, als die philosophische, steigt, muss in ihrer vollen Stärke gesagt werden; aber nicht mürrisch und trübsinnig. Die Offenbarung ist beides nicht. Sie ist Ernst. Einige heilige Begebenheiten lassen ebensowenig eine Ausbildung zu, als sie andre zu fordern scheinen. Die Stelle: ‚Die Gräber taten sich auf, und stunden auf viele

[46] Eberhard, J. A., and Walter Sparn, *Neue Apologie des Sokrates oder Untersuchung der Lehre von der Seeligkeit der Heiden*, Hildesheim: G. Olms, 2001. See also: Aner, Karl, *Die Theologie der Lessingzeit*, Hildesheim: G. Olms, 1964, pp. 285–95; Allison, Henry E., *Lessing and the Enlightenment: His Philosophy of Religion and Its Relation to Eighteenth-Century Thought*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1966, pp. 40–42.

> Leiber der Heiligen, die da schliefen; und gingen aus den Gräbern nach seiner Auferstehung, und kamen in die heilige Stadt, und erschienen vielen.‘ Diese Stelle ist von der letzten Art.[47]
>
> [The moral truth of the Bible, especially where it rises a step higher than the philosophical truth, must be expressed in its full strength; but not morosely and gloomily. Revelation is neither. It is serious. Certain sacred events allow less [interpretive] training while others seem to demand it. Consider the passage: ‘The tombs were opened, and many bodies of the saints who slept there stood up and went out from the tombs after his resurrection and entered the holy city and appeared to many.’ This passage is of the latter kind.]

According to Klopstock, these lines from Matthew (27:52–53) index a religious truth concerning the resurrection of saints that was expressed in too feeble a manner to be effectual, and so Klopstock decided to add what he imagined to be their missing details, fabricating enough material for nearly three Gesänge (XI, XIII, XV)[48] in *Der Messias*. More importantly, the passage provides insight into Klopstock’s religious thought, which links the moral truth of the bible to rhetoric, thereby forming an intimate bond between poetry and religion as the preeminent (not to mention archetypal) vehicle for communicating moral truth. By contrast, Klopstock finds philosophy inadequate for communicating religious truths because it cannot express such truths with the full emotional intensity they deserve.[49] Yet merely asserting that certain events require

[47] Klopstock, “Von der heiligen Poesie,” *Sämmtliche Werke*, vol 10, p. 235.
[48] In Gesang XI, Klopstock interprets the “Leiber der Heiligen” to be figures from the Old Testament. In Gesang XIII these figures congregate at Golgotha, the site of Christ’s crucifixion, to reflect upon the resurrection of Christ. In Gesang XV the figures appear to the elect among the living.
[49] Katrin Kohl develops a reading of Klopstock’s religious thought by comparing his essay “Von der besten Art über Gott zu denken” with Lessing’s criticism of it in his *Briefe die neuste Literatur betreffend*. Kohl’s inquiry seeks to delimit the borders between theology and literature at a moment when the autonomy of art was starting to assert itself. See her essay “Die ‘beste Art über Gott zu denken’? Auseinandersetzungen um das religiöse Potential der Dichtung im 18. Jahrhundert,” in: *Literatur und Theologie im 18. Jahrhundert. Konfrontationen, Kontroversen und Konkurrenzen*, ed. Hans-Edwin Friedrich, Wilhelm Haefs, Christian Soboth, Berlin: De Gruyter, 2011, pp. 225–43. For a technical survey of the relationship between poetry, philosophy, and rhetoric in Klopstock’s thought see: Hilliard, *Philosophy, Letters, and the Fine Arts in Klopstock’s Thought*, London: Institute of Germanic Studies,

more poetic amplification than others implies that the events themselves call out for elaboration, a strategy that minimizes Klopstock's role in subjectively selecting which biblical scenes to amplify. As it happens, Klopstock also cautions against too much poetic amplification: "Ich nenne schon Irrtum, wenn man zuweilen da hundert Schritte sehn will, wo man nur einige sehn sollte, und wenn man sehn will, wo man nur glauben sollte."[50] [I would already call it an error, if one occasionally wanted to see a hundred steps where one should only see a few, and if one wanted to see where one should only believe.] Considering the sheer scope of his amplification of the Thomas story, it becomes difficult to read this rule and not apply it to Klopstock himself.

To want to *see more* in cases where one should simply believe in the available reports brings the poetics of *Der Messias* dangerously close to the figure of doubting Thomas. Like Thomas, Klopstock elaborates scripture on the assumption that there is a more forceful, immanent truth to be found, but in order to decipher that truth he must doubt scripture. Klopstock argues, "Gewisse Wahrheiten, deren völlige Erkenntnis uns in diesem Leben noch nicht notwendig ist, sind uns so offenbart, daß sie so viele Winke zu sein scheinen, weiter über diese Wahrheiten nachzudenken."[51] [Certain truths, whose full knowledge is not yet necessary to us in this life, are revealed to us in such a way that they appear to be many hints and suggestions that we further contemplate these truths]. To contemplate the incomplete truths of scripture is also to contemplate perceived inadequacies contained therein.[52] This might sound trivial today, but in 1755 the doctrine

University of London, 1987. For a study on the relationship between rhetoric and religion in Klopstock's poetry see Kohl, Katrin, *Rhetoric, the Bible, and the Origins of Free Verse. The Early "Hymns" of Friedrich Gottlieb Klopstock*, Berlin, 1990.

[50] Klopstock, "Von der heiligen Poesie," *Sämmtliche Werke*, vol 10, p. 234.

[51] Ibid., p. 234.

[52] For scholarship that relates the idea of adequatio (or adequate knowledge) in Baumgarten's philosophical aesthetics to Klopstock's *Der Messias*, see Berndt, Frauke, *Poema/Gedicht: Die*

of *sola scriptura*,[53] which Luther used to oppose corrupt ecclesiastical traditions like the selling of indulgences,[54] still exerted influence over the protestant community and greatly limited the ways in which theologians and commentators could engage the bible. Insofar as the doctrine of *sola scriptura* grants sole authority to the bible rather than any external commentaries—literary or otherwise—Klopstock's "heilige Poesie" would not have met the approval of Luther, who argued "if something more than God's word is presented to us, it is certainly erroneous, seductive, un-Christian, lying and deceitful."[55] But Klopstock and other writers sympathetic to pietism took recourse to Philipp Spener's (1635–1705) call for *tota scriptura*, which viewed non-canonical and apocryphal literature as an additional resource to expand and sharpen a congregation's religious knowledge.[56] Despite Luther's warnings against adding to scripture, Klopstock used epic poetry

Epistemische Konfiguration der Literatur um 1750, Berlin: De Gruyter, 2011.

[53] For Luther's use of *sola scriptura* against Rome, see "The Smalclad Articles" (1537) in Luther, Martin, *Basic Theological Writings*, third edition, ed. Timothy F. Lull and William R. Russell, Minneapolis 2012. Here Luther writes: "It will not do to formulate articles of faith on the basis of the holy Fathers' works or words. Otherwise, their food, clothes, houses, etc., would also have to be articles of faith—as has been done with relics. This means that the Word of God—and no one else, not even an angel—should establish articles of faith" (p. 346). For Luther's use of *sola scriptura* against humanist readings of scripture see his "Concerning the Letter and the Spirit," in *Basic Theological Writings*, pp. 53–71.

[54] In his 95 Theses, Luther writes: "Injury is done the Word of God when, in the same sermon, an equal or larger amount of time is devoted to indulgences than to the Word," *Basic Theological Writings*, p. 11.

[55] Luther, "Concerning the Letter and the Spirit," in *Basic Theological Writings*, p. 65. To silence the "murderous noise [of] raging amplification" within humanist interpretations of scripture, Luther quotes from Deuteronomy 4:2: "You shall not add to the words I command you, nor take from them" (ibid.).

[56] Against *sola scriptura*, Spener argued: "*all* scripture, without exception, should be known by the congregation if we are all to receive the necessary benefit. If we put together all the passages of the Bible which in the course of many years are read to a congregation in one place, they will comprise only a very small part of Scriptures which have been given to us. The remainder is not heard by the congregation at all, or is heard only insofar as one or another verse is quoted or alluded to in sermons, without, however, offering any understanding of the entire context, which is nevertheless of the greatest importance." See Spener, Philipp Jacob, *Pia Desideria*, trans. Theodore G. Tappert, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1964, p. 88.

to elevate the manner in which religious truths were communicated by introducing stronger affects that could (ideally) help facilitate confessions of faith.

When Klopstock started to write *Der Messias*, epic poetry was still considered to be the privileged literary genre.[57] It gained a portion of its authority by tapping into the empirical data or "facts" of biblical "history." In his book *Futures Past*, Reinhart Koselleck observes that around 1750 "the line dividing the camps of historians and creative writers became osmotically porous. It was demanded of the writer […] that he articulate historical reality if he wished to be convincing and have influence [and] like the writer, [the historian] was to distill from his history its meaningful unity."[58] By poeticizing the language of biblical history, Klopstock had to confront both demands so that his Christian epic would offer "experiences that readers [could] learn from and make their own by repeating virtuous deeds from the past and avoiding previous mistakes."[59] Yet perhaps Klopstock was drawn to history for a simpler reason. Unlike allegory, history does not require additional abstraction to grasp its moral truth: "Die beiden Hauptfehler der meisten allegorischen Gemälde sind, daß sie oft gar nicht oder doch sehr mühsam verstanden werden, und daß sie, ihrer Natur nach, uninteressant sind."[60] [The two most common mistakes of most allegorical paintings are: they often cannot be understood, or only with painstaking effort, and they are—by nature—uninteresting.] Klopstock finds allegory "uninteresting" because the path to its moral truth is

[57] For instance, Breitinger values epic poetry above other literary genres because of its perceived effectiveness in edifying the public and its ability to establish a distinct national literature. Breitinger, Johann Jacob, *Critische Dichtkunst*, Band I, hrsg. von Paul Böckmann und Friedrich Sengle, Stuttgart: Metzler, 1966, pp. 77–106. See also Payne, Charlton, *The Epic Imaginary. Political Power and its Legitimations in Eighteenth-Century German Literature*, Berlin 2012, especially chapter 2, "The Mimesis of the Epic and Epic Mimesis: Klopstock's Theory of Hexameter as Darstellung," pp. 61–74.
[58] Koselleck, Reinhart, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, trans. Keith Tribe, New York: Columbia University Press, 2004, p. 206. Also see Lehmann, Robert, *Impossible Modernisms*, Stanford: Stanford Univerity Press, 2016, p. 2.
[59] See Koselleck, *Futures Past*, p. 27.
[60] Klopstock, "Eine Beurteilung der Winckelmannischen Gedanken über die Nachahmung der Griechischen Werke in den schönen Künsten," *Sämmtliche Werke*, vol 10, p. 256.

always obviated by opaque symbols and signs that common sense cannot easily decipher. History, by contrast, is more pleasing because it directly appeals to the reader's interest by claiming to represent real people and actual events.

Of course, epic poetry is distinct from history in that it does not claim to be grounded in empirical facts, yet it still participates in a process of commemoration that is consistent with Cicero's notion of "Historia Magistra Vitae," in which history communicates virtues worthy of being socially reproduced. Not only does Klopstock's epic poetry fulfill this function—as a kind of Poiesis Magistra Vitae that poeticizes history to achieve the same pedagogical ends—it also seeks to create *authentic* religious experiences through affective poetry. With this in mind, Klopstock's Thomas should not be understood as an allegory pointing to the dangers of religious skepticism, for John's version already accomplishes this to some degree. Rather, the reader should affectively experience Thomas's historically grounded doubt as the narrative unfolds, and (ideally) become conditioned to suppress any residual skepticism about Christ's miraculous resurrection or the prospect of eternal salvation that is entangled in it.

In *Der Messias*, Klopstock dedicates large sections and almost an entire chapter to presenting the dramatic effects of Thomas's doubt. By altering the sequence of events, representing the apostle's inner thoughts, and placing Thomas in dialogue with his fellow apostles, Klopstock attempts to harmonize scripture and popular morality. Thus, his poetic amplifications are not without a political agenda.[61] In many ways the politics of Klopstock's Thomas correspond to the

[61] That epic poetry served political purposes is expressed by Breitinger, who argues that the "epische Fabel hat eine große und wichtige, meistens politische Wahrheit, an deren Beobachtung nicht nur die Wohlfahrt einzelner Menschen, sondern das Heil ganzer Völcker hängt, zur Haupt-Absicht" [The epic fable has as its main purpose a great and important, usually political truth, on the observation of which depends not only the well-being of individuals but the benefit of entire peoples] (p. 197).

politics of neology (1740–1790),[62] a theological movement committed to forging a stronger unity between reason and faith. Neologians shaped their hermeneutics after Leibniz's *Theodicy* (1710), which articulated one of the central problems the group strove to resolve:

> But since reason is a gift of God, even as faith is, contention between them would cause God to contend against God; and if the objections of reason against any article of faith are insoluble, then it must be said that this alleged article will be false and not revealed: this will be a chimera of the human mind, and the triumph of this faith will be capable of comparison with bonfires lighted after a defeat.[63]

Disharmony between faith and reason calls into question the perfection of God, which for Leibniz would be absurd, so the real problem must be linked to discord within human thinking itself—mistakenly grounding beliefs on false articles of faith. Leibniz was responding to Pierre Bayle's *Historical and Critical Dictionary* (1697), which devastated the Christian imaginary by claiming that "history is simply a collection of the crimes and misfortunes of the human race,"[64] and that God was complicit in these crimes by doing nothing to prevent them despite his assumed omnipotence.[65] Leibniz saw things differently. His *Theodicy* developed a popular counter-narrative that emphasized the "good news" of history.[66] According Leibniz, all injustices recorded in human

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[62] For information on Klopstock's ties to Neologie, see Kaiser, Gerhard, *Klopstock. Religion und Dichtung*, Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1963, especially the sections titled: "Neologische Freunde und Förderer" and "Vernunft und Offenbarung," pp. 28–35.
[63] Leibniz, Gottfried, *Theodicy. Essays on The Goodness of God and the Freedom of Man and the Origin of Evil*, ed. Austin Farrer, trans. E.M. Huggard, La Salle, Ill. 1990, § 39 / pp. 96–97.
[64] Bayle, Pierre, *Historical and Critical Dictionary: Selections*, trans. Richard H. Popkin, Indianapolis: Hackett, 1991, p. 147.
[65] For sources on the philosophical history of the theodicy problem, see Nieman, Susan, *Evil in Modern Thought. An Alternative History of Philosophy*, Princeton 2002; Marquard, Odo, *Schwierigkeiten mit der Geschichtsphilosophie*, Frankfurt am Main, 1982; Marquard, Odo, *Skepsis in der Moderne philosophische Studien*, Stuttgart, 2007; Marquard, Odo, *Apologie des Zufälligen*, Stuttgart, 1986.
[66] Within eighteenth-century literature, Leibniz's *Theodicy* had a polarizing effect. For instance, it was thought to be a source of inspiration for one of the eighteenth century's most cherished poems, Alexander Pope's *Essay on Man* (1734). In 1755, Lessing and Mendelssohn entered an essay contest put on by the

history can be subsumed under the premise of a greater good, which makes "all the apparent deformities of our little world combine to become beauties […] God, by a wonderful art, […] makes evil serve the greater good."[67] The antinomy between faith and reason would become an enormous site of controversy within eighteenth-century discourse,[68] and Klopstock's version of Thomas seeks to subordinate his religious skepticism to the greater good of the religious community by having the apostle publicly acknowledge his transgression (something John does not do): "Thomas betet' ihm [Christ] nach, stand auf, und ging zu den Jüngern, / Und zu den anderen Brüdern umher, und bat um Erlassung / Seiner Schuld."[69] [Thomas prayed to Christ, stood up, went to the apostles and the other brothers who stood around and asked them to forgive his sin.]

The political urgency of Klopstock's Thomas can be detected in his decision to present religious skepticism as more widely dispersed throughout the community of believers. In other words, Thomas's incredulity (while extreme) is not exceptional, but appears to be a shared problem

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Preußische Akademie der Wissenschaften that asked the public to compare a line from Pope's essay that read "Everything is good" with Leibniz's *Theodicy*. See Lessing's essay "Pope ein Metaphysiker!" in Lessing, Gotthold Ephraim, *Werke 1754–1757*, Band 3, Hrsg. von Conrad Wiedemann unter Mitwirkung von Wilfried Barner und Jürgen Stenzel, Frankfurt am Main 2003. Voltaire's *Candide* (1759) was much more critical of Leibniz and ridiculed his naively optimistic religious views.

[67] Leibniz, Gottfried, *Theodicy*, p. 216. See also Leibniz, *On the Ultimate Origination of Things* (1697), which anticipates many of the arguments in his later *Theodicy*. Here he clearly seems to have Bayle in mind when he wrote: "the world appears to be a certain confused chaos rather than a thing ordered by some supreme wisdom, especially if one takes note of the conduct of the human race. I confess that it appears this way at first glance, but a deeper look at things forces us to quite the contrary view […for] as soon as you see the whole […] you will understand that what looked accidental […was] made with consummate skill by the creator." See Leibniz, Gottfried, *Leibniz: Philosophical Essays*, trans. Roger Ariew and Daniel Garber, first edition, Indianapolis 1989, p. 153.

[68] See Beiser, Friedrich, *The Fate of Reason: German Philosophy from Kant to Fichte*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987.

[69] Klopstock, Friedrich Gottlieb, *Der Messias*, in *Werke und Briefe: Historisch-Kritische Ausgabe*, Band 1/2, Hrsg. von Horst Gronemeyer, Elisabeth Höpker-Herberg, Berlin 2000, p. 193 (Gesang XVII, V. 64–66).

that afflicts other apostles. For instance, Peter—the "rock of the church"—attempts to bring Thomas out of the "Betäubung seines Tiefsinns" [daze of his melancholy] by identifying with the apostle's skepticism: "Auch ich zweifelte, Thomas." [I doubted too, Thomas.] On the road to Emmaus, Kleophas and Matthias also sympathize with Thomas's demand for empirical proof: "wenn wir ihn [Christ] sähen,/ O das würd' uns noch mehr, noch mächtiger überzeugen, / Als der stillen Betrachtung Licht, das die Seele mit Wahrheit / Überströmt[70]!" [If we saw him, O' that would convince us still more powerfully, like the light of tranquil contemplation that overflows the soul with truth.] Decentralizing skepticism so that it is not concentrated solely in the figure of Thomas politically situates Klopstock's poetic amplification into an accommodationist framework. He wants to show that modest forms of doubt have a proper place within an economy of faith, while extreme forms are marked by the discourse of Schwärmerei [fanaticism].

The figure of the Schwärmer [fanatic] was often used pejoratively across discourses—by defenders of faith and reason alike—to critique "delusional" religious, philosophical, and theological assumptions and practices.[71] Klopstock makes use of this discourse of Schwärmerei, though not to pejoratively condemn skepticism as such, but to diagnose and *treat* the spread of its most radical forms. The Thomas of *Der Messias* is not the imposter (Betrüger) Schwärmer attempting to usurp divine authority for personal advancement (though this aspect of it is indeed present in the witness testimony, of which I will have more to say later); rather, Thomas is the

[70] Ibid., p. 109 (Gesang XIV, V. 595–97).
[71] For scholarship on this topic, see Anthony La Vopa's essay "The Philosopher and the Schwärmer: On the Career of a German Epithet from Luther to Kant," in *Enthusiasm and Enlightenment in Europe, 1650–1850*, ed. Lawrence Klein and Anthony La Vopa, San Marino, CA, 1998, pp. 85–117; Fenves, Peter, *A Peculiar Fate: Metaphysics and World History in Kant*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991; Lyotard, Jean-Francois, *Enthusiasm: The Kantian Critique of History*, trans. Georges Van Den Abbeele, Stanford, 2009.

melancholic Schwärmer whose isolation and inclination toward *excessive* contemplation occasions further loss of faith.[72] The danger of Thomas is that Klopstock deliberately represents his melancholic state as contagious, a true mark of the Schwärmer. Klopstock presents the skepticism of the other apostles as resulting from their sympathetic encounters with Thomas, as if they were being "infected" by his doubt. For example, the spread of Thomas's "disease" can be found most emphatically in the apostle Lebbäus, who agrees with Thomas that the testimony of the witnesses does not add up to a real encounter with Christ; that what they saw were, at best, signs sent from Christ to assuage their overwhelming sense of grief; at worst, figments of their own overheated imaginations. Upon this recognition Lebbäus sinks into doubt and Klopstock intentionally brings the two apostles into the same semantic register to underscore the infectious nature of Thomas's doubt: "Trübe verfinsternde Zweifel / Ließ in den Seelen, die schon verwundet waren, Lebbäus / Traurige Rede zurück."[73] [Lebbäus' mournful speech left bleak, darkening doubts in the souls that had already been wounded.] "Bleak doubts," "wounded souls," and a prevailing sense of "mourning" are qualities that consistently come to define Thomas's psychological state throughout *Der Messias*, and Klopstock's emphasis on the communicability of this state normatively invokes the discourse of Schwärmerei.

More dangerous than the communicability of Thomas's doubt and melancholy was the fear that it could deteriorate into atheism. Shaftesbury's *A Letter Concerning Enthusiasm* (1707), which

[72] In the seventeenth century, Melancholy was thought to be a disease caused by an imbalance of humors (too much black bile); finding the right mixture of "jovial" humors, it was thought, could restore harmony to the afflicted. See Heyd, Michael, *Be Sober and Reasonable: The Critique of Enthusiasm in the Seventeenth and Early Eighteenth Centuries*, New York: Brill, 1995; see also Klibansky, Raymond, Erwin Panofsky, and Fritz Saxl, *Saturn und Melancholie: Studien zur Geschichte der Naturphilosophie und Medizin, der Religion und der Kunst*, Frankfurt am Main 1990.
[73] Klopstock, *Der Messias*, p. 126 (Gesang XIV, V. 1224–27).

Klopstock was familiar with, argues that nothing "besides ill humour can be the cause of atheism."[74] Hilliard also reads the incredulity of Klopstock's Thomas as a "prelude to atheism,"[75] which makes curing his "sickness" all the more urgent. But not just urgent in the sense of bringing resolution to the Thomas story; it is also urgent for Klopstock's poetics, which are designed to affectively convince its readership of the truth of Christianity by invoking the "immortal spirits" of the Old and New Testaments who testify to that truth. This much is clear from the opening lines of *Der Messias*, which gives voice to the "unsterbliche Seele" [immortal soul] inhabiting biblical history. The problem for Klopstock's poetics is that the atheist apathetically resists elocution altogether, thereby breaking the chain of enthusiasm that links poet, audience, and God.[76] The communicability of enthusiasm—which literally means a god dwelling within—depends on the receptivity of the audience, which must acknowledge the *theos* in order to be moved [bewegt] in the first place. Without this the *theos* of Klopstock's poetry has nobody to possess, no subject in which to dwell.[77] In other words, the atheist would be unmoved by both scripture and heilige

[74] See Shaftesbury, *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*, ed. by Lawrence E. Klein, Cambridge, 1999, p. 13.
[75] See Hilliard, *Freethinkers, Libertines and Schwärmer: Heterodoxy in German Literature, 1750-1800*. London: IGRS Books, 2011, p. 62.
[76] Plato discusses this relationship in his dialogue *Ion*: "Well, do you see that the spectator is the last of the rings I spoke of, which receive their force from one another by virtue of the loadstone. You, the rhapsodist and actor, are the middle ring, and the first one is the poet himself. But it is the deity who, through all the series, draws the spirit of men wherever he desires, transmitting the attractive force from one into another." Plato, *Collected Dialogues*, ed. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns, Princeton, 2005, pp. 221–22.
[77] Peter Fenves writes on the platonic conception of enthusiasm as "entheos," which literally means a god within, or to be possessed by a deity. See "The Scale of Enthusiasm," in *Enthusiasm and Enlightenment 1650–1850*, ed. Lawrence Klein and Anthony La Vopa, San Marino, CA: Huntington Library, 1998, pp. 117–53. Shaftesbury notes how atheism can also be seen as a form of enthusiasm. My intention here is not to challenge this idea, but to suggest that the driving force behind the atheist's enthusiasm would not be a god (theos), but must be something terrestrial or egoistic. See Shaftesbury, *Characteristics of Men*, pp. 27–28, 365–79.

Poesie. The possibility that Thomas will convert to atheism constitutes a source of dramatic tension throughout Gesang XIV. For instance, the first description of him reads as follows: "Da erhoben alle [die Jünger] die Augen / Still gen Himmel; nur Didymus [Thomas] nicht.[78] [And so all the apostles silently raised their eyes towards heaven, with the exception of Thomas.] Thomas's skepticism prohibits *him* from being moved by the spiritual enthusiasm of his religious community, yet the bigger concern is that if he succumbs to atheism and that too is communicable, then the prospect of a thoroughly disenchanted world becomes possible.

II. Amplifying Thomas

Klopstock harshly judges a writing style that he associates with philosophy because he believes it strips the healthy body of scripture down to its most naked moral precepts. He writes, "Die Religion ist, in der Offenbarung selbst, ein gesunder männlicher Körper. Unsere Lehrbücher haben ein Gerippe daraus gemacht."[79] [Revealed religion is by itself a healthy man's body. Our textbooks have turned it into a skeleton.] In other words, translating the moral truths of scripture into philosophical language diminishes the force of those truths because it abstracts away from the rich particularities of scripture. Klopstock expresses his views on style more clearly in his essay *Von der besten Art über Gott zu denken* (1758) [On the best way to think of God], in which he concludes that poetry is the best way to think of God because it engages "die ganze Seele"[80] [the

[78] Klopstock, *Der Messias*, p. 99 (Gesang XIV, V. 224–25). translation modified.
[79] Klopstock, "Von der heiligen Poesie," *Sämmtliche Werke*. vol 10. p. 232.
[80] Klopstock, Friedrich Gottlieb, "Von der besten Art über Gott zu denken," *Sämmtliche Werke*. 18 Bde. u. Supplementband (Bd. XIII-XVIII: Sämmtliche sprachwissenschaftliche und ästhetische Schriften). Hrsg. von August Leberecht Back & A. R. C. Spindler. Leipzig 1823–1830, Bd. 11, p. 211.

entire soul] and allows one to abandon "alle Arten von Zweifeln und Unruh über die unbegreiflichen Wege Gottes"[81] [all forms of doubt and unrest about the incomprehensible path of God]. Poetry, he argues, prepares one "endlich mit der allertiefsten Unterwerfung […] Gott lieben können."[82] [finally to be able to love God with the deepest submission.] Here Klopstock's critique of a "kalte metaphysische Schreibart" [cold metaphysical style] pejoratively calls into question the efficacy of moral precepts to guide an imagined public towards virtuous life. When recalling his own education at Schulpforta, Klopstock dramatizes his critique of this cold metaphysical style by personifying "die Sprache" [language], which, in the following passage, laments being narrowly confined by the stylistic conventions of scholasticism:

> Mich (denn heute darf ich von mir selbst reden) sollen Schulmethode, Armseligkeit am guten Ausdrucke, und jene überflüssigen Untersuchungen verstellen, die nichts weniger, als die Kenntnis der Menschen und ihre Verbessrung angehn. Ich sei nicht mehr die Führerin und die Freundin des gesunden Verstandes, sondern eine Grüblerin, welche die von ihr erhitzte Einbildungskraft vergebens zu fesseln sucht.[83]
>
> [I (for today I am permitted to speak of myself) am to be distorted by scholasticism, a lack of good expressions, and those superfluous investigations that concern nothing less than human knowledge and its improvement. I am no longer seen to be the leader and friend of a sound mind, but rather an excessive brooder attempting in vain to confine an overheated imagination.]

[81] Ibid., p. 213.
[82] Ibid., p. 214.
[83] Klopstock, "Von dem Range der schönen Künste und der schönen Wissenschaften," *Sämmtliche Werke*, vol 10, p. 256.

The "Schulmethode" [scholastic methods] of the philosopher, or Grübler[84] as Klopstock describes here, curbs the creative potential of a more poetically stylized language, which Klopstock regards as essential for communicating sublime religious truths.

However, even if a poetic mode of communication enjoys greater freedom and has more success than philosophy, what can the poet possibly add to scripture if it *already* represents a 'healthy body'? [85] Klopstock evades this question through claims of piety and reverence, yet insists that some parts of scripture require poetic amplification. Some stories, Klopstock writes, are designed "mit so wenigen Worten, daß wir *notwendig* Umstände hinzudenken müssen, um sie uns vorzustellen."[86] [with so few words that we must *necessarily* think up added circumstances in order to imagine them.] Thus, from the standpoint of Klopstock's poetics, certain scenes of the bible are more "healthy" than others, and poetry (rather than philosophy) should be called on to restore these missing circumstances.

Neither the naked truths of philosophy nor the densely coded allegories of baroque poetry can adequately fill in the missing details of scripture. History, by contrast, supplies exempla that are "[...]für die meisten die *einzige* Reizung, die ihnen *übrig* ist, mindestens einige Stufen der Tugend zu ersteigen. Denn die Aussprüche der Pflicht sind ihnen zu *kalt*. Sie *wirken nicht* auf ihr Herz"[87] [for most people the only stimulation that remains available to them, in order to climb at least a few steps toward virtue. For expressions of duty are too cold for them. They do not affect

[84] Klopstock also uses the word "Grübler" in describing Thomas: "Ihn [Jesus], ihn selber habt ihr gesehn? ihr alle? erwiedert / Thomas, und bleibt mit *grübelnder* Stirn, und ernsterem Auge / Stehn." [Have you seen him, himself? all of you? answers Thomas, and stands still with brooding brow and a more serious eye] in Klopstock, *Der Messias*, p. 99 (Gesang XIV, V. 201–3).
[85] Klopstock, "Von der heiligen Poesie," *Sämmtliche Werke*, vol. 10, p. 232.
[86] Ibid., p. 233 (emphasis mine).
[87] Klopstock, "Von dem Fehler Andere nach sich zu Beurteilen," *Sämmtliche Werke*, vol. 10, p. 299.

their hearts] History provides an affective route to grasping virtue that does not require any further abstraction. Essentially Klopstock's *Der Messias* attempts to retie the knot between poetry and history that Aristotle severed,[88] thereby drawing his poetics into a tradition of exemplarity. According to Aristotle, the poet and philosopher are related because both speak of general truths, whereas the historian can only speak of particular truths. Klopstock, however, finds that the particularities of biblical history (as exempla of virtue) already function as general truths insofar as they immediately communicate the actions and deeds worthy of social reproduction. Poetry can serve to amplify, intensify, or even repurpose the particular truths of history in novel ways.[89] Therefore, Klopstock does not limit himself to telling of what might happen, but instead tells of what is and of what has been; his task is to carefully follow in the "Fußstapfen der Offenbarung"[90] [footsteps of scripture] and express in more rich detail what the Evangelists already left behind:

> Der Teil der Offenbarung, der uns Begebenheiten meldet, besteht meistenteils nur aus Grundrisse, da doch diese Begebenheiten, wie sie wirklich geschahn, ein großes, ausgebildetes Gemälde waren. Ein Dichter studiert diesen reichen Grundriß, und malt ihn nach den Hauptzügen aus, die er in demselben gefunden zu haben glaubt.[91]
>
> [The part of revelation that reports of events to us consists mostly of mere outlines, since these events—as they actually occurred—were like great, well-formed

[88] See Aristotle, *The Complete Works of Aristotle: Revised Oxford Translation*, vol. 1 & 2, ed. Jonathan Barnes, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984, p. 4979.
[89] Matthew Roller, for example, describes this process in his article on exemplarity in Roman culture: "To produce an exemplum, then, is to struggle constantly to establish or disestablish a particular interpretation of an action's value, a monument's reference, or an imitator's success, and alternative readings threaten to (or do) proliferate at every instant. But far from undermining the ethical cogency of the exemplum, these ubiquitous opportunities for debate and contestation are the lifeblood of exemplary discourse—this is how every example can be made anew, or deployed in a novel way, to meet the requirements of any new contingency" (p. 7). Roller, Matthew, "Exemplarity in Roman Culture: The Cases of Horatius Cocles and Cloelia," *Classical Philology*, vol. 99, no. 1, Jan. 2004, pp. 1–56.
[90] Klopstock, "Von der heiligen Poesie," *Sämmtliche Werke*, vol. 10. p. 233.
[91] Ibid., p. 224.

paintings. A poet studies these rich outlines and paints them according to the main features he believes to have found in them.]

From this statement Klopstock does not appear to invent any new subject matter at all, but rather, like an obedient apprentice painter, he (re)presents stories already established by the master—only adding more details to those outlines that seem to call out for further elaboration.

However, the relation between the "great painting" of biblical history and Klopstock's poetic amplification becomes complicated if we again consider the case of Doubting Thomas. Klopstock's amplification of the circumstances surrounding the "historical" Thomas can more properly be understood as an amplification that was derived from that of another poet, namely John, who developed his version of Thomas in response to the perceived inadequacies inhering in the synoptic gospels. So what exactly does Klopstock add to scripture?

To my mind, Klopstock attempts to add "Darstellung" [embodiment][92] to scripture. Klopstock's concept of Darstellung has been the subject of much scholarship,[93] and it is primarily concerned with activating the sensibility (Empfindsamkeit) in the audience through novel expressions of language. Klopstock manipulates rhythm, meter, and tone to create movement (Wortbewegung) and liveliness (Lebendigkeit) that the audience experiences upon reception.[94] The

[92] There are no adequate English equivalents to capture the ways in which Klopstock invokes this term.
[93] For scholarship on Klopstock's theory of Darstellung, see Menninghaus, Winfred, "Klopstocks Poetik der schnellen Bewegung," in: *Gedanken über die Natur der Poesie. Dichtungstheoretische Schriften*, Frankfurt am Main 1989, pp. 259–361; Menninghaus, Winfred, "Darstellung: Friedrich Gottlieb Klopstocks Eröffnung eines neuen Paradigm," in: *Was heißt "Darstellen"?*, ed. Christian L. Hart Nibbrig, Frankfurt am Main, 1994, pp. 205–26; Behnke, Kerstin, "Toward an Understanding of Romantic Darstellung," in *The Spirit of Poesy*, ed. Richard Block and Peter Fenves, Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern, 2000, pp. 60–74; Thayer, Terence K., "Rhetoric and the Rhetorical in Klopstock's Odes," *Euphorian: Zeitschrift für Literaturgeschichte*, Band 74, Heft 4, Heidelberg, 1980; Kaiser, Gerhard, "Denken und Empfinden: ein Beitrag zur Sprache und Poetik," *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte*, Band 35, Stuttgart, 1961, pp. 321–32.
[94] This aspect of Darstellung brings Klopstock very close Longinus's theory of the sublime. See

expressed goal of Darstellung is the alienation (Täuschung)[95] of the audience from familiar expressions in order to lead them into new horizons of thought and feeling. In this way, Darstellung distinguishes itself from the static mimesis of nature (Nachahmung der Natur) by prioritizing creative representations—as opposed to "bloße Vorstellungen"[96] [naked representations]. Klopstock is more concerned with transmitting the affects of an object or state of mind than he is with presenting an object as such. However, this would suggest that the object, sacred history, is a means to an end, an end that seeks to enlist the sensibility of the audience towards rethinking the particular truths and exempla of scripture. The theory of Darstellung makes the political underpinnings of Klopstock's epic more pronounced; it suggests that there are unmistakable calculations standing behind his amplifications of scripture, and the claim to piety or "necessity" only obscures the poetic and political agenda he brings to biblical history. The aim of these amplifications, therefore, is not just to restore the missing details of history, but also to extract what Klopstock believes to be the immanent meaning withheld from certain scenes of scripture.

Further difficulties emerge once the primary objective of Darstellung is understood to be satisfying the audience's desire to be moved. Klopstock writes, "dass ihn [den Zuhörer] etwas bewege, dies ist das heißeste Dürsten unseres Geistes; er liebt alles, was so ihn erquickt."[97] […that something should move the listener, that is the most urgent thirst of our spirit; it loves everything

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Longinus, *On Great Writing*, ed. Oskar Piest, trans. G.M.A. Grube, New York, 1957, especially § 39: "Does not the music of the flute stir the emotions of an audience, take them out of themselves, fill them with Corybantic frenzy, and by its rhythmic beat compel him who hears it to step to its rhythm and identify himself with its tune, even if he be quite unmusical?" (p. 51).

[95] "Der Zweck der Darstellung ist Täuschung." See Klopstock, "Von der Darstellung," *Sämmtliche Werke*, vol. 10, pp. 194–95.

[96] Ibid., p. 194.

[97] Klopstock, *Werke und Briefe: Historisch-Kritische Ausgabe*. Abteilung II (Epigramme), hrsg. von Klaus Hurlebusch, Berlin, 1982, p. 54. Translation modified.

that refreshes it.] This does not square well with the discourse of exemplarity, given that there can be no guarantee one will be moved in the direction of virtue. If anything and everything can move the audience, then moral edification would be contingent given its subordinate position in Klopstock's poetics.[98] However, Klopstock remains confident that "höhere Poesie" is incapable of leading the audience to vice:

> Die höhere Poesie ist ganz unfähig, uns durch blendende Vorstellungen zum Bösen zu verführen. Sobald sie das tun wollte, hört sie auf zu sein, was sie ist. Denn so sehr auch einige sich selbst klein machen wollen, so können sie sich doch niemals so weit herunterbringen, dass sie etwas anderm, als was wirklich edel und erhaben ist, diese große und allgemeine Bewegung aller Kräfte ihrer Seele erlaubten.[99]
>
> [Sublime poetry is entirely unable to mislead us into evil by means of dazzling representations. As soon as she wanted to do so, she would cease to be sublime. For, as much as some want to make themselves small, they can never bring it down so low as to allow anything other than what is truly noble and sublime, this great and universal movement of all the powers of their souls.]

While this passage may serve to diffuse objections against using scripture as material for poetic representations, the assumption that "höhere Poesie" cannot lead the audience to vice calls for further examination. It can be inferred from the passage that Klopstock assumes a pre-established harmony between virtue and the sublime. In order for the sublime to "move the entire soul" of the audience, there must be something recognizably virtuous in the sublime images. Moving the entire soul refers to the harmonization of the faculties: imagination, understanding, and the will (or heart): "Die Kräfte unsrer Seelen haben eine solche Harmonie unter sich, sie fließen, wenn ich es

[98] Menninghaus develops the idea that Klopstock's notion of Wortbewegung fails to correspond to the ideal of "Moralische Schönheit." See Menninghaus, "Klopstocks Poetik der schnellen Bewegung," pp. 306–318.
[99] Klopstock, "Von der heiligen Poesie," *Sämmtliche Werke*, vol. 10, p. 227.

sagen darf, so beständig ineinander, daß, wenn eine stark getroffen wird, die andern mitempfinden, und in ihrer Art zugleich wirken."[100] [The powers of our souls have such harmony amongst themselves that, if I may be permitted to say, they consistently flow into each other such that if one is strongly affected, the others sympathize with it and act in kind.] If one of these faculties becomes powerfully affected, then the other faculties can sympathize ("mitempfinden") and ultimately be "moved." However, if virtue were a condition for the movement of the soul, then this would place a significant restraint on the sublime itself; it would shackle the sublime to an ethos, thereby curbing the spontaneity of the genius.[101] It would also render the goal of alienation mundane insofar as the sublime must, in every instance, transport the audience to the sphere of virtue. In other words, heilige Poesie surrenders its autonomy. These tensions within Klopstock's own poetics must be kept in mind when reflecting on the figure of Doubting Thomas, whose virtue can be understood as limited.[102] If "höhere Poesie" strives to coordinate sublime writing with historical events to move the audience towards virtuous life, then why dedicate nearly an entire chapter to a figure who holds the status of a negative example?

In *Der Messias*, Thomas's one conviction is that he will not believe. "Wenn ich," Thomas proclaims, "mit bebendem Arm um deine Füße [Jesus] mich winde, / Und sie halte: dann will ich glauben! Ich werde nicht glauben!"[103] [When I, with trembling arms, coil myself around your feet (Jesus) and hold them, then I will believe. I will not believe.] Klopstock often juxtaposes the

[100] Klopstock, "Von der heiligen Poesie," *Sämmtliche Werke*, vol. 10, p. 231.
[101] Klopstock asserts that "Die höhere Poesie ist ein Werk des Genie." [Sublime poetry is a work of genius.] Ibid., p. 226.
[102] In the Gospel of John, Thomas's faith has been interpreted as insincere insofar as it appears to be the result of Christ shaming him into conviction. See Bultmann, Rudolf, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, trans. G.R. Beasley-Murray, ed. R.W.N. Hoare and J.K. Riches, Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1971, p. 694.
[103] Klopstock, *Der Messias*, p. 120 (Gesang XIV, V. 991–92). Translation modified.

subjunctive with the indicative to emphasize how Thomas's desire to believe never triumphs over his demand for direct evidence. Doubting Thomas, as a negative example, shows how faith and reason will remain out of tune unless he allows indirect routes to harmonize his convictions. By indirect routes, I mean that he would have to allow witness testimony to make impressions upon his sensibilities (Empfindsamkeit)—not just his understanding (Verstand). Unlike Leibniz, who assigned the task of distinguishing between true and false articles of faith to human reason alone, Klopstock allows Empfindsamkeit to have a share in determining the validity of "alleged articles of faith."[104] In perhaps his most spiritually desperate moment—the point at which the apostle realizes that he is still unable to believe even after his guardian angel appears to him—Thomas asks himself: "Wer schmachtet so nach Überzeugung, als ich?"[105] [Who yearns for conviction as I do?] On the one hand, this could mean that nobody yearns for conviction more than Thomas (comparative): nobody is more in need of external assistance, given that he is incapable of believing through his own powers. Yet, it could also mean that nobody yearns for conviction quite like Thomas does (modality). This reading suggests, by contrast, that Thomas's skepticism displays a mode of thinking that closes off all other possibilities for conviction; reason alone provides the path. This extreme mode of thinking is cause for alarm, and, as I will argue, Klopstock negotiates the figure of the Schwärmer into his amplification of Thomas to make his political campaign against radical skepticism more audible for the modern skeptic.

[104] On this point Klopstock closely follows Quintilian, who also accords the orator's rhetoric a proper share in convincing a judge of the truth by means of eloquence. Quintilian claims that the orator's argumentative proofs "may make the judge think our cause the better, but impressions on his feelings make him wish it to be the better, and what he wishes he also believes." See Quintilian, *Institutes of Oratory or, Education of an Orator*, trans. Rev. John Selby Watson, rev. and ed. Lee Honeycutt and Curtis Dozier, N.P., 2015, Book VI, ii, p. 5.
[105] Klopstock, *Der Messias*, p. 99 (Gesang XIV, V. 987–88).

III. Treating Thomas's Skepticism

Since it would have been too controversial to completely negate Thomas on the basis of his perceived Schwärmerei, Klopstock develops strategies for treating his excessive doubt, which mostly involve persuading him to "think differently." Thomas's initial response to witness testimony provides access to his thinking about Christ's alleged resurrection:

> Itzt seyd ihr [die Jünger] zu lebhaft / Durch das alles getäuscht, was ihr [Maria Magdalene und andere weibliche Zeugen] erzählet. Ich werde, / Wenn ihr es erst zu tragen vermögt, der Zweifel Ursach, / Welche mir anders zu denken gebeut, euch offen entdecken, / Nichts verschweigen! Ihr glaubt, ihr Jünger Jesus, die Mährlein, / Die sie erzählen, doch nicht?[106]

> [Now you [disciples] are too lively, deceived by everything they [Maria Magdalene and other women at the grave] speak of. If you are able to bear it, I will reveal to you the cause of doubt, which compels me to think differently, do not withhold anything! After all, you don't believe, you disciples of Jesus, in the fairy tales that they speak of, do you?]

From Thomas's perspective the other apostles have been deceived by the reports of Christ's resurrection and are too excited to think rationally about it. Thomas's solution to overcoming his doubt is to find the true causality of what occurred; to find a natural explanation for a supernatural event—an attitude that corresponds with deism, which rejects both incoherent Church dogma and dubious historical facts.[107] But more importantly, if Klopstock can indicate how Thomas's thinking poses a threat to the greater good of his religious community, then he might be able to persuade his readers to renounce Thomas's demand for a natural explanation and accept the revealed truth of scripture. As Hilliard pointed out in his study on religion and heterodoxy in German literature,

[106] Klopstock, *Der Messias*, p. 99 (Gesang XIV, V. 206–11). Translation modified.
[107] See Allison, *Lessing and the Enlightenment: His Philosophy of Religion and its Relation to Eighteenth-Century Thought*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1966, pp. 3–16.

a logic of the "Schwärmerkur" [cure for fanaticism] emerges in literature that attempts to rehabilitate "transgressive" figures. Hilliard defines his notion of a Schwärmerkur through Christoph Martin Wieland's *Der Sieg der Natur über die Schwärmerey, oder die Abentheuer des Don Sylvio von Rosalva* (1764), which is a reworking of Cervantes's *Don Quixote*. Throughout Wieland's *Don Sylvio*, the narrator identifies and condemns the pernicious aspects of Schwärmerei on the one hand, and isolates and celebrates its edifying qualities on the other.[108] Much like the family and friends of Don Quixote, who, out of concern for him, burn his books of chivalry because they feed the flames of his wild imagination, Klopstock's adaptation attempts to purge philosophy and excessive contemplation from Thomas's mind so that he can finally experience joy in the edifying faith of his peers. In the third Gesang of *Der Messias*, readers get their first impression of Thomas through his guardian angel Umbiel, whose observations almost sound like a prognosis:

> Umbiel sprach ferner: Der dort voll Gedanken und einsam / Tief in dem Walde sich zeigt, ist Thomas, ein feuriger Jüngling. / Stets entwickelt sein Geist aus Gedanken Gedanken! Ihr Ende / Findet er oft nicht, wenn sie sich vor ihm, wie Meere, verbreiten! / Bald hätt' er sich in dem finstern Gebäu des träumenden Saddok / Kläglich verloren; allein des Messias gewaltige Wunder / Retteten ihn, er verließ die labyrinthischen Irren, Kam zu Jesus.[109]
>
> [Umbiel spoke again: "He over there deep in the forest, full of thoughts and solitary, is Thomas, a fiery young man. His spirit is constantly developing thoughts from thoughts! Often he finds no end to them, as they spread out before him like a vast sea! He would have almost been miserably lost in the dark building of the dreaming Zadok; Only the powerful miracles of the Messiah rescued him, he left the labyrinthine, wayward paths and turned to Jesus.]

[108] See Hilliard, *Freethinkers, Libertines and Schwärmer: Heterodoxy in German Literature, 1750-1800*. London: IGRS Books, 2011.
[109] Klopstock, *Der Messias*, pp. 51–52 (Gesang III, V. 263–72).

Thomas's melancholy is particularly pronounced here. He is not the imposter Schwärmer but the melancholic Schwärmer.[110] Umbiel, Thomas's guardian angel, rules out the possibility of him being an imposter by naming excessive contemplation (rather than deceit) as the cause of his disturbed psychological state. The poem provides even further evidence in support of this. When describing Thomas, Maria Magdalene states, "Er zweifelt aus Angst […] nicht aus bösem Herzen."[111] [Thomas doubts from fear and anxiety […] not from an evil heart]. Since Thomas is himself deceived, he does not intentionally deceive others. Rather, the driving force of his self-deception is melancholic Schwärmerei, whereby the apostle becomes so withdrawn into himself that he loses his ability to distinguish what is true from what is merely a chimera of his imagination. For instance, after he encounters a disguised angel in a graveyard he believes that his grief-stricken state is responsible for conjuring up a false experience: "Ja, ich bin niedergesunken, bin eingeschlummert, und habe / Diesen Fremdling im Traume gesehen[112]!" [Yes, I have sunk down, fallen asleep and seen this stranger in dreams!] When reality is confused for a dream the figure of the Schwärmer emerges, and this politically marks Thomas's "denkende Seele" [thinking soul] as especially dangerous for the Christian community. However, these lines also suggest a slight variation on a common theme in the discourse of Schwärmerei, for often the Schwärmer is someone who becomes so excessively inflamed by passions that an alternate reality appears. In

[110] The difference is worth emphasizing if one considers the more extreme responses to cases of the imposter. Mendelssohn, for instance, goes beyond Shaftesbury's recommendation to let ridicule censor the bad kind of enthusiasm by calling for the state to intervene in more serious offences: "Soll man der einreißenden Schwärmerey durch Satyre oder duch aüßerliche Verbindung entgegenbringen?" in: Mendelssohn, Moses, *Gesammelte Schriften*, Band 3, hrsg. von Dr. G.B. Mendelssohn, Leipzig, 1843, pp. 413–15.
[111] Klopstock, *Der Messias*, p. 115 (Gesang XIV, V. 806–7).
[112] Klopstock, *Der Messias*, p. 123 (Gesang XIV, V. 1106–7).

this case, however, it would be more accurate to say that Thomas's melancholy does not so much produce an alternative reality as it *misplaces* reality. Within literature making use of the Schwärmer motif, it is always a much greater offense to conjure up false realities for deceptive ends than it is to lose sight of reality, which is crucial for understanding why Thomas is deserving of help as opposed to satire and ridicule.[113] In Thomas's case the goal is not satire, but to restore the reality he misplaces.

Also embedded in Umbiel's description of Thomas is that it foreshadows the dramatic culmination of his doubt: the moment in which he almost relapses into his prior Sadducee beliefs. The Sadducees were an elite Jewish sect that rejected the idea of revealed knowledge involving supernatural spirits, eternal salvation, and the resurrection of Christ.[114] Peter becomes fatigued after repeated attempts to assuage Thomas's "qualenvolle Gedanken" [painful thoughts] and tells him that his own doubts actually blind him from seeing the truth:

> Deine [Heftigkeit] blendet sich nur, mit der du zweifelst! Wir sahen! / Und wir wurden entzückt! […] Du siehst nichts! schaffest dir Schatten, / Bange Bilder von Gräbern und Nacht, erschreckende Zweifel! […] Geh zu den Sadducäern zurück, und glaube mit ihnen, / Daß kein Engel, noch Geist sey, noch Auferstehung vom Tode![115]
>
> [Your vehemence blinds you only to that which you doubt! We saw and we were enchanted […] you see nothing! You create for yourself shadows, fearful images of graves and night, and terrifying doubts! […] Go back to the Sadduccees and

[113] Louise Gottsched's *Die Pietisterey im Fischbein-Rocke* (1736) is one example of eighteenth-century satirical literature that tries to expose the moral depravity of the imposter Schwärmer Herr Scheinfromm.
[114] Relevant passages involving the Sadducee tradition in the bible include Mark 12:18–27, Matthew 22:23–33, and Luke 20:27–40. A more historically detailed account that distinguishes the Sadducee sect from the Pharisee and the Essene sects can be found in Josephus, "The Antiquities of the Jews" and "The War of the Jews," in *The Complete Works*, trans. William Whiston and Thomas Nelson, Nashville, 1998.
[115] Klopstock, *Der Messias*, p. 115 (Gesang XIV, V. 820–23; 828–29). Modified Translation.

believe as they do that there are no angels nor spirits nor resurrection from the dead!]

Thomas's blindness is, according to Peter, willful given that all the witnesses claim to testify to Christ's resurrection. The ultimatum is clear: if Thomas cannot accept the resurrection of Christ as the true reality, then he faces exile from the community of believers. This is precisely what Thomas opts for. The apostle remains adamant about having a personal experience with Christ, and, in a display of jealous confusion, asks: "Euch nur erschiene der Herr? nicht mir?"[116] [The Lord appears only to you and not to me?] Thomas, quite reasonably, rejects the notion that Christ would appear only to the others, and decides to search for peace in a nearby graveyard.

The graveyard scene is a combination of prayer and soliloquy in which Thomas performs the kind of self-examination Shaftesbury prescribes for the enthusiast to determine whether their enthusiasm is of a "noble" or schwärmerisch type.[117] Throughout Gesang XIV Thomas maintains that the witnesses were actually the ones who falsely mistook their dreams for reality: Ihr [die Jünger] wähnt ihn erstanden, / Und ihr freut euch nicht minder, obwohl ein Traum euch getäuscht hat."[118] [You disciples falsely suppose that he has risen und yet you are no less joyful, even though you have been deceived by a dream]. The aim of self-examination is to clear matters up; it involves observing one's own humorous disposition to determine if it is even possible to act as an "impartial

[116] Ibid., p. 116 (Gesang XIV, V. 847.).
[117] On self-examination, Shaftesbury writes: "For to judge the spirits whether they are of God, we must antecedently judge our own spirit, whether it be of reason and sound sense, whether it be fit to judge at all by being sedate, cool and impartial, free of every biasing passion, every giddy vapour or melancholy fume. This is the first knowledge and previous judgment: To understand ourselves and know what spirit we are of." See Shaftesbury, *Characteristics of Men*, p. 28.
[118] Klopstock, *Der Messias*, p. 119 (Gesang XIV, 967–968). Earlier, Thomas attempts to attribute natural causes to the witness testimony, at one point even suggesting that the sun was being reflected into the armor of a Roman soldier to account for the illuminated figure that was said to be an angel (p. 98, Gesang XIV, V. 165–70).

judge" when evaluating the testimony of others. However, in the graveyard Thomas finds himself overwhelmed by melancholy, writhing like a "Wurm in Mitternächten,"[119] [worm at midnight] and contemplating suicide: "Möcht' ich liegen bey ihm [dem toten Körper Christi] und schlummern, müde von Wunden / Meiner Seele!"[120] [I would like to lie next to him (the dead body of Christ) and fall asleep, I'm so exhausted from the wounds of my soul]. The apostle's melancholic condition makes him unsuitable to judge and brings the procedure of self-examination to an abrupt end. Religious contemplation, Shaftesbury argues, often leads to melancholy and makes self-examination unsuccessful:

> The melancholy way in which we have been taught religion makes us unapt to think of it in good humour […] We can never be fit to contemplate anything above us when we are in no condition to look into ourselves and calmly examine the temper of our own mind and passions.[121]

Finding no peace on his sojourn through the graveyard, Thomas only becomes more intensely afflicted by his religious contemplation. The apostle's guardian angel enters at the moment when his skepticism becomes most (self-)destructive: "Wessen ist diese Klage, die aus den Gräbern hervorschallt? / Fiel dich ein Mörder an? Und kann ich dir helfen, o Fremdling? / Rede! Wo bist du? Ich will dir deine Wunde verbinden."[122] [Whose laments do I hear sounding from the graves? Did a murderer strike you? O Stranger, can I help you? Speak! Where are you? I want to bind your wound]. Thankful but reluctant to accept the angel's offer, Thomas is again convinced that his "wounded soul" could only be healed through the direct evidence of Christ's

[119] Ibid., p. 117 (Gesang XIV, V. 880).
[120] Ibid. (Gesang XIV, V. 894–95).
[121] See Shaftesbury, *Characteristics of Men*, pp. 17–18.
[122] Klopstock, Der Messias, p. 120 (Gesang XIV, V. 1008–10).

appearance. Before taking leave of Thomas, the angel recommends that he "Schau gen Himmel, und lerne mit Furcht und Zittern klagen! / Freuen sollen wir uns mit Furcht und Zittern, so sollen / Wir auch klagen!"[123] [Look towards heaven and learn to lament with fear and trembling! Just as we should rejoice with fear and trembling, so too should we lament!] The allusion to Philippians 2:12 is apt, given that Paul composed these lines while in prison and uncertain of his fate. Philippians 2:1–14 recommends that one "be of the same mind as Christ" and act not out of self-interest but from fear and trembling, which is to act as if Christ were present even though he might be absent. The implied presence of Christ should serve to regulate Thomas's thoughts and actions in a pragmatic sense.[124] Because Thomas is in no condition "to look up," he finds himself imprisoned by melancholy, impartial, and driven by self-interest. The graveyard scene is when Klopstock's amplification of Thomas becomes most polemical. He strongly advises against following Thomas's skeptical path of despair by implying that it could end in suicide.

A final observation to take away from Umbiel's description of Thomas in Gesang III is perspectival. Thomas is shown to be isolated and brooding in the Garden of Gethsemane, the place where Jesus succumbed to doubt in two of the synoptic gospels.[125] Also, Thomas's solitary excursion into the graveyard takes place in the "fernsten Gräbern des Ölbergs" [furthest graves of the Mount of Olives], the location of Christ's doubt in the Gospel of Luke.[126] Klopstock, therefore, attempts to bring Thomas and Christ into relation as doubting figures. Yet to accomplish this Klopstock must abandon the Gospel of John—the only gospel in which Thomas and Jesus directly

[123] Ibid., p. 121 (Gesang XIV, V. 1040–42).
[124] Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, pp. 294–99.
[125] See Matthew 26:36–46; Mark 14:32–52.
[126] See Luke 22:39–46.

communicate—and turn to the synoptic Gospels for his amplification of Jesus's doubt. In John's narrative, Jesus heroically accepts his fate, whereas the other Gospels portray him as reluctant to accept it.[127] Klopstock's decision to do this is a deliberate synthesis of scripture that praises one mode of doubt over another. That Klopstock attempts to establish Christ and Thomas as foils is especially interesting in the light of apocryphal literature, which portrays Thomas as Christ's twin brother.[128] The name "Didymus," which Klopstock repeatedly uses to refer to Thomas, means twin. It is as if Klopstock built the possibility of Thomas being Christ's twin into his narrative strategy, but wants his readers to identify Thomas as the weaker brother who fails to rise above his own limited perspective. In any case, the two modes of doubt function as foils; Thomas finds himself in exile, staring into a grave, while Christ emerges triumphantly from his moment of doubt. Gesang V of *Der Messias* depicts Christ at his most skeptical moment:

> Hast du [Gott] mit ausgebreitetem Arm den Kelch der Leiden / Über mich ausgegossen? Ich bin ganz einsam, von allen, / Die ich liebe, den Engeln; den Mehrgeliebten, den Menschen, / Meinen Brüdern […] Doch nicht mein Wille geschehe! / Vater, dein Wille geschehe! Mein hingeheftetes Auge / Schauet aus in die Nacht, und kann nicht weinen; mein Arm bebt, / Starrt nach Hülfe gen Himmel empor; ich sink' auf die Erde: / Sie ist Grab! Es ruft, durch alle Tiefen der Seele, / Laut ein Gedanke dem andern: Ich sey von dem Vater verworfen![129]
>
> [God, have you poured the cup of sorrow over me with outstretched arms? I am totally alone, from all of those whom I love: the angels, the most beloved, humankind, my brothers […] yet not my will be done, but your will, Father. My eye gazes out intensely into the night and cannot weep. My arm trembles as I look up towards the heavens for help. I sink to the earth; it is a grave! Calling out aloud

[127]Compare John 18:11 and Matthew 26:39.
[128]In *The Acts of Thomas* a king confuses Jesus with Thomas in § 11: "He saw the Lord Jesus talking with the bride. He had the appearance of Judas Thomas, the apostle who shortly before had blessed them and departed; and he said to him, 'Did you not go out before them all? And how is it that you are here now?' And the Lord said to him, 'I am not Judas Thomas, I am his brother.'" *The New Testament Apocrypha*, p. 452.
[129] Klopstock, *Der Messias*, p. 111 (Gesang V, V. 398–407).

through all the depths of my soul is one thought after another: I have been forsaken by the Father.]

The images of complete isolation, peering out into darkness, and sinking into the earth all show striking parallels with Thomas's doubts in Gesang XIV. However, the difference between the two modes of skepticism is that Christ's doubts are always regulated by the presence of another's will. In other words, Christ experiences a moment of kenosis in which he voids his individual will, trusts in the indirect evidence of God's will, and finds his way out of the labyrinth of doubt. By contrast, Thomas rejects the moment of kenosis and maintains his demand for more evidence, which causes him to withdraw into melancholy and become schwärmerisch in his contemplation. In my analysis, Klopstock's poetics turn the concept of kenosis on its head by seeking to fill up scripture with more powerful affects rather than trusting in the original stories to bring about modern confessions of faith. It is by questioning the efficacy of the foil between Christ and Thomas that the charge of heterodoxy can be leveled against Klopstock. Thomas could easily be celebrated as the patron saint of the enlightenment insofar as he refuses to yield to the will and testimony of others through faith alone; he exemplifies the spirit of autonomy; he thinks and acts according to self-imposed principles; and he has a rigorous method of investigation. Klopstock most likely did not intend for this reading of his Thomas, but in linking the apostle to Christ through a shared experience of doubt, he invites the audience to compare, and, as I have already suggested, he can only *hope* that the audience will be moved to the more virtuous mode of skepticism—whichever mode that may be. Thus, between the ambivalence inhering in Thomas's doubt and the fact that Klopstock's poetics privilege affect and movement over virtue, one can discover a red thread of heterodoxy running through his amplifications.

In *Der Messias*, as in the Gospel of John, Thomas only manages to believe by seeing the miracle of Christ's resurrection first hand. By adding flesh to the bones of scripture Klopstock

hopes that his readers will affectively experience Thomas's radical skepticism and confirm the moral lesson that John that had already announced, namely, that it is better to believe than to see. The audience is invited to *feel* the "wounds" of Thomas's soul in order to renounce the cause of those wounds. Yet, given how the poetics privileges movement (Bewegung) over edification (or at least remains in denial over how those two things might be at cross-purposes), it seems likely that a true skeptic would have cause to celebrate the mode of doubt captured in Klopstock's adaptation of Thomas. In this way, Klopstock's Thomas becomes a split exemplum; one that forces the reader to choose between two uncertain paradigms of doubt, which the etymology of the word "zweifeln" lucidly captures. The affects of Klopstock's Thomas could persuade some skeptics to make room for faith, while others might just as easily double down and, like Thomas, demand more convincing proof. Regardless of which mode of doubt the author wanted his audience to affirm, Klopstock's amplification of Doubting Thomas provides a useful heuristic for understanding the poetics of *Der Messias*.

CHAPTER TWO[130]

From the Page to the Heart: Lessing's Copernican Turn in Faith and the Genesis of a Romantic Spirit

I. Towards a Lively Faith: Introduction into the Fragment Controversy

As we have just seen in Lessing's debate with Klopstock and the editors of the *Nordische Aufseher*, if poetry wishes to secure its status as a "freie Kunst," it cannot serve any ends other than its own.[131] It is perhaps worth repeating here that the autonomy of art depends on judgments that take into consideration the quantity and quality of sensible pleasure occasioned by works of art, rather than how well such works correspond to external doctrines or ideologies. Lessing, therefore, was right to interrogate Klopstock's religious poetry in his *Briefe die Neueste Literatur Betreffend* to the extent that it exploited the office of poetry to facilitate a duty to believe [Glaubenspflicht] among his audience. Yet, the primary question of this chapter is not about art's

[130] Throughout this chapter I used two English translations of Lessing's work. For Lessing's *Laokoon* I used W.A. Steel's translation found in the following volume: Bernstein, J.M. *Classic and Romantic German Aesthetics*. Ed. J.M. Berstein. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003. For the majority of Lessing's contributions of the *Fragmentenstreit* I used Hugh Nisbet's translation in the following volume: Lessing, Gotthold Ephraim. *Philosophical and Theological Writings*. Trans. Hugh Nisbet. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005. All other translations of Lessing are my own.

[131] Lessing, *Laokoon*, section IX: "so wünschte ich, daß man den Namen der Kunstwerke nur denjenigen beilegen möchte, in welchen die Schönheit seine erste und letzte Absicht gewesen. Alles andere, woran sich zu merkliche Spuren gottesdienstlicher Verabredungen zeigen, verdienet diesen Namen nicht, weil die Kunst hier nicht um ihrer selbst willen gearbeitet, sondern ein bloßes Hilfsmittel der Religion war, die bei den sinnlichen Vorstellungen, die sie ihr aufgab, mehr auf das Bedeutende als auf das Schöne sahe." [I should like the name of 'works of art' to be reserved for those alone in which the artist could show himself actually as artist, in which beauty has been his first and last object. All the rest, in which too evident traces of religious ritual appear, are unworthy of the name because art here has not wrought on her own account, but has been an auxiliary of religion, looking in the material representations which she made of it more to the significant than to the beautiful.]

assumed autonomy, which, of course, is itself a form of ideology. Rather, this chapter will explore several aspects of Lessing's theology: 1) how Lessing's aesthetics relates to his theological writing; 2) the theological context of the fragment controversy; 3) the significance of Lessing's theology of spirit in relation to that context; 4) how history can be used to legitimize not the letter, but the spirit of religion. Therefore the question of *adequatio* is still in play, but will no longer be limited to concerns about raising the level of expression in scripture through poetry; rather it concerns multiplying the possible forms of religious experience by introducing a new mode of thinking [Denkungsart] through the biblical tradition. My simple thesis throughout the chapter will be that Lessing's theological writings develop an aesthetic regime of faith that changed the way eighteenth-century religious subjects could relate to, understand, and experience the biblical tradition. The fragment controversy (1774–80), which is often overlooked by literary scholars, must be understood as a point of intersection between Lessing's theology, aesthetics, literary criticism, and dramatic works.

Justifying this thesis is, however, not such a simple task given the highly ambiguous nature of Lessing's theological writings. As many scholars have indicated, these ambiguities make it difficult to pin down Lessing's "actual position" vis-a-vis religion. For instance, in describing Lessing's mature theological works, Hugh Nisbet argues that "ambiguity is a necessary part of his position."[132] Similarly, Toshimasa Yasukata's recent book *Lessing's Philosophy of Religion and the German Enlightenment* describes "the fragmentariness, unsystematicness, ambiguity, and contradictoriness [as] prominent features of [Lessing's] theological and religious-philosophical

[132] Nisbet, Hugh, "Lessing and Philosophy," in Fischer, Barbara and Fox Thomas, C., *A Companion to the Works of Gotthold Ephraim Lessing*, New York: Camden House, 2005, p. 146.

thought."[133] These ambiguities bring up the question of how exactly readers should relate Lessing's theology to existing faith traditions and the ecclesiastical authorities of his time. Were they meant to undermine the protestant church, or did they function more as an elaborate apology on its behalf? Recent scholarship suggests that arguments can be made for both readings.[134] Even Lessing's own contemporaries found his religious "position" frustratingly enigmatic, eventually causing the fragment controversy (1774–80) to spill over into the pantheism controversy (1785–89) following Lessing's untimely death in 1781. Rumors of Lessing's "actual" religious position were circulated posthumously by Friedrich Jacobi (1743–1819), who, in his *Über die Lehre des Spinoza* (1785), alleged that Lessing confessed his belief in Spinoza's pantheistic view of religion while the two of them were reading Goethe's *Prometheus* poem:

> **Lessing**: Ich finde es [das Gedicht] gut […] der Gesichtspunkt, aus welchem das Gedicht genommen ist, das ist mein eigener Gesichtspunkt […] Die orthodoxen Begriffe von der Gottheit sind nicht mehr für mich; ich kann sie nicht genießen […] Dahin geht auch dies Gedicht; und ich muß bekennen, es gefällt mir sehr.
> **Jacobi**: Da wären Sie ja mit Spinoza ziemlich einverstanden.
> **Lessing**: Wenn ich mich nach jemand nennen soll, so weiß ich keinen andern.

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[133] Yasukata, Toshimasa, *Lessing's Philosophy of Religion and the German Enlightenment*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2003, p. 8.

[134] See, for instance, Karl Barth's chapter on Lessing where Barth (mistakenly) conflates Lessing's theology with neology, a movement that instrumentalized rationalism to apologetic ends in its reevaluation of Church dogma: "If we wish to understand Lessing's aims as a theologian we must proceed from the fact that every one of the positions of the theological neologians of that time […] were also contained and preserved in Lessing's own position." Barth, Karl, *Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century: Its Background and History*, second ed., London: SCM, 2001, p. 225. Gordon Michalson, by contrast, argues that any theology willing to dispense with history constitutes a radical assault on the foundation of religion: Michalson, Gordon E., *Lessing's "Ugly Ditch": A Study of Theology and History*, University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1985. Also, Henry Allison is more cautious, properly distinguishing Lessing from other theological movements of his time, and understands Lessing's "position" more in terms of an attempt at sharpening the theology that Leibniz had already developed at the start of the eighteenth century: Allison, Henry, *Lessing and the Enlightenment: His Philosophy of Religion and its Relation to Eighteenth-Century Thought*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1966 (see especially Chapter 4, "Lessing's Philosophy of Religion, and its Leibnizian Roots").

> **Jacobi**: Spinoza ist mir gut genug: aber doch schlechtes Heil das wir in seinem Namen finden!
> **Lessing**: Ja! Wenn Sie wollen! […] Und doch […] Wissen Sie etwas besseres[135]?
>
> [**Lessing**: I find the poem good […] The point of view from which the poem was taken is also my own […] The orthodox concepts of divinity are no longer for me; I cannot enjoy them. The subject of the poem is also about this, and I must confess that it pleases me very much.
> **Jacobi**: Then you would seem to be in agreement with Spinoza.
> **Lessing**: If I were to be named after anyone, then I know no one better.
> **Jacobi**: Spinoza is good enough for me, and yet what mixed blessing we find in his name!
> **Lessing**: Yes, if that's the way you look at it […] but do you know anyone better?]

Up until the mid 1780s, Spinoza was considered public enemy number one by the church and its academy of scholars. In addition to his pantheistic conception of God, which advances the possibility of subjectively accessing God through reflective means, Spinoza's *Theological-Political Treatise* (1670) waged a monumental attack against an ecclesiastical habitus of intolerance that transformed belief into prejudice by not permitting or taking seriously any external criticism of scripture.[136] Spinoza's controversial interpretation of the bible as a product of human history and culture (rather than a divinely inspired and infallible document made legible only to the privileged few) earned him the title of atheist in the eyes of the church. For Jacobi to publish his private conversation with Lessing created a new wave of controversy emanating from what appeared to be a confession of Lessing's "true" Spinozistic position on religion. While even a superficial glance at Lessing's theological writings should suffice to exonerate him from the charge

[135] See Jacobi, Friedrich, *Über die Lehre des Spinoza*, Hrsg. von Klaus Hammacher, Irmgard-Maria Piske, Marion Lauschke. Felix Meiner Verlag: Hamburg, 2000, p. 22. Translation mine.
[136] Two of Reimarus' fragments, which Lessing published in 1773, address the issue of religious intolerance against rational theology: *Von Duldung der Deisten* and *Von Verschreiung der Vernunft auf den Kanzeln*.

of atheism, a comparative analysis of Lessing and Spinoza does in fact show some similarities. Yet there are also crucial differences. While it is true that, like Spinoza, Lessing viewed the bible as a human document and called for the free and open criticism of it, he distinguished himself from Spinoza by opposing the use of natural science to explain scripture,[137] and rejected the idea that obedience could be the organizing principle of modern faith.[138] For Lessing, modern faith depends on the project of Bildung and the incorporation of aesthetic principles into hermeneutics. By introducing aesthetic structures and a developmental model of faith into his theology, I argue, Lessing creates the conditions of possibility for a lively faith, one that topples the Glaubenspflicht [obligation to believe] model of faith advocated by neologians like Basedow, Cramer, and Klopstock.[139]

It is also worth mentioning, even if only anecdotally, Søren Kierkegaard's (1813–1855) enthusiastic celebration of Lessing's religious ambiguity. In his *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, Kierkegaard offers the following "expression of gratitude" to Lessing:

> [Lessing] closed himself off in the isolation of subjectivity, did not allow himself to be tricked into becoming world historical or systematic with regard to the religious, but he understood, and knew how to maintain, that the religious pertained to Lessing and Lessing alone, just as it pertains to every human being in the same way, understood that he had infinitely to do with God, but nothing, nothing to do

[137] See Spinoza's *Theological-Political Treatise:* "I hold that the method of interpreting scripture, does not differ from the [correct] method of interpreting nature, but rather is wholly consonant with it. The [correct] method of interpreting nature consists above all in constructing a natural history, from which we derive the definitions of natural things, as from certain data. Likewise, to interpret Scripture, we need to assemble a genuine history of it and to deduce the thinking of the Bible's authors by valid inferences from this history, as from certain data and principles."

[138] Ibid.: "it was not the purpose of the Bible to teach any branch of knowledge. For from this we can readily infer that it requires nothing of men other than obedience, and condemns not ignorance but disobedience."

[139] See my previous chapter on Lessing's response to Basedow and Cramer in his *Briefe*, as well as his response to Klopstock's essay *Von der Besten Art über Gott zu Denken*.

> directly with any human being. See, this is the object of my expression, the object of my gratitude—now, if only it is certain that this is how it is with Lessing—if.[140]

Kierkegaard radicalized Lessing's model of faith by elaborating its perceived subjective-existential underpinnings, and he assigned value to the futility of confirming Lessing's "true" beliefs. The ominously dangling "if" at the end of the passage attests to Kierkegaard's own uncertainty as to whether or not his "expression of gratitude" is warranted. Does Lessing resist subsuming religion under a world historical system like Hegel and his disciples? The vast majority of scholarship disagrees with Kierkegaard on this point. Lessing's theological writings, above all his *Erziehung des Menschengeschlechts*, are often read as a prelude to the totalizing system of Hegelian dialectics, to the extent that Lessing's conception of "Erziehung" also shows human history to gradually dispense with revealed knowledge once it has recourse to rational knowledge. And yet I take Kierkegaard's "if" very seriously. For it suggests that something more is at stake in Lessing's theological writings than a mere prelude to Hegel. Without digressing too much further, I would only add that Kierkegaard's "expression of gratitude" approaches the central question underlying Lessing's theological investigations: "was verbindet mich denn dazu?"[141] [what, then, binds me to it?]. What binds modern religious subjects to their faith is the question at the heart of Lessing's influential *Beweis des Geistes und der Kraft* (1777). While Kierkegaard is perhaps correct to suggest that Lessing would not attribute the binding force of Christianity to a world historical system that promises to explain all religious phenomena from an external standpoint, is

[140] See Kierkegaard, Søren, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*, vol 1, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, Princeton University Press: Princeton, 1992, p. 65.
[141] Lessing, Gotthold Ephraim, *Über den Beweis des Geistes und Der Kraft*, in *Werke und Briefe*, Band 8, hrsg. von Arno Schilson, Frankfurt am Main, Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1989, p., 352.

it not an evasion of "actual" history—the "trap of Idealism" that Kierkegaard so vigorously criticizes—to claim that Lessing's enigmatic approach to Christianity emerged from "the isolation of subjectivity?"[142] A closer look at the particular historical context in which Lessing wrote reveals that his writings did not emerge from the isolation of his own subjectivity, but were in fact written in response to questions that engaged a broader community of public opinions.

This context is crucial for making Lessing's theological innovations visible both within his own time, and with respect to his subsequent reception by the early romantic school and beyond. Lessing's *Anti-Goeze* (1778), a text that polemically defends the legitimacy of rhetorical demonstration in theological arguments, represents a significant moment in the self-assertion of poetics over enlightenment theology near the end of the eighteenth century.

> Es kömmt wenig darauf an, wie wir schreiben: aber viel [mehr], wie wir denken. Und Sie wollen doch wohl nicht behaupten, daß unter verblümten, bilderreichen Worten notwendig ein schwanker, schiefer Sinn liegen muß? Daß niemand richtig und bestimmt denken kann, als wer sich des eigentlichsten, gemeinsten, plattesten Ausdruckes bedienet? Daß, den kalten, symbolischen Ideen auf irgend eine Art etwas von der Wärme und dem Leben natürlicher Zeichen zu geben suchen, der Wahrheit schlechterdings schade? […] Wie lächerlich, die Tiefe einer Wunde nicht dem scharfen, sondern dem blanken Schwerte zuschreiben![143]

[142] Kierkegaard was likely under the spell of Schlegel, who praises Lessing's unsystematic style: "[Lessing] habe das lebendige Gespräch noch mehr in der Gewalt gehabt als den schriftlichen Ausdruck […] Das Interessanteste und das Gründlichste in seinen Schriften sind Winke und Andeutungen, das Reifste und Vollendetste Bruchstücken […] Das beste, was Lessing sagt, ist, was er, wie erraten und erfunden, in ein paar gediegenen Worten voll Kraft, Geist und Salz hinwirft; […] Einzeln und kompakt, ohne Zergliederung und Demonstration, stehen seine Hauptsätze da, wie mathematische Axiome; und seine bündigsten Räsonnements sind gewöhnlich nur eine Kette von witzigen Einfällen." [Lessing was said to have even more control in living conversation than in written expression […] The most interesting and the most rigorous passages in his writings are hints and insinuations, the most mature and perfected are fragments […] The best things Lessing says are those things that he throws out, as if guessed at and invented, in a few sound words full of power, spirit and salt; […] His main clauses are individual and compact, without analysis and demonstration, like mathematical axioms; his most concise reasoning is usually just a chain of witty ideas]. Schlegel, Friedrich, "Über Lessing," in *Anthenäums-Fragmente und andere Schriften*, hrsg. von Andreas Huyssen, Stuttgart: Reclam, pp. 59–60. Translation mine.

[143] Lessing, *Werke in drei Bände, Anti-Goeze II*, p. 485. Translation mine.

> [It depends less on how we write than on how we think. Surely you [Goeze] do not want to maintain that a weak and misguided sense necessarily lies behind allusive and figurative language? That no one can think properly and correctly except those who use the most factual, common and dull expressions? Or that the attempt to instill something of the warmth and life of natural signs in cold and symbolic ideas would damage the truth? […] How absurd to attribute the depth of a wound to the sword's shine rather than to its sharpness!]

It's not the style in which we write, but how we think, and the metaphors, parables, dialogues, allegories, and similes that Lessing mobilizes throughout his theological writings are oriented towards solving the common problem of how to attain religious conviction without forsaking reason. To be clear, I am not suggesting that Lessing's theological writings should be treated as simple poetic documents that have no real contribution to offer theology. This would be an oversimplification that underestimates the value of the content within those writings and it would also overlook a much longer tradition of philosophers and theologians making use of figurative language to construct their arguments. One need only recall Plato's cave analogy, Leibniz's dream of an inverted pyramid that represents the best of all possible worlds, or Nietzsche's repurposing of Greek myth to articulate a genealogy of morals. My point is, rather, that Lessing does not exclude culture from adopting a theological Denkungsart, and his religious writings elaborate, in a fugue-like manner, the insight that enlightenment theology has come to demand so much from the biblical letter [Buchstabe] that it alienates religious subjects from the spirit [Geist] of the bible. In other words, enlightenment theology confuses the logos of religion for its ethos, making a "Religion von Vernunft" [religion of reason.] There are several examples of how Lessing elaborates this insight throughout his writings. His *Eine Parabel* (1778) uses the metaphor of architecture to diagnose the problem of "bibliolatire," or the unnecessary worship of the letter of religion. His dialogical invocation of the apocryphal *Das Testament Johannes* (1777) attempts to reverse the priority of the letter/spirit distinction that the Gospel of John consecrates

through its well-known line: "in the beginning was the word." Finally, his *Ernst und Falk* (1778) dramatizes his thesis that letter is not the spirit by showing how religious institutions and customs are merely externalizations of a constantly evolving spirit.

Of course, the suggestion that literature, rhetoric, and aesthetics could offer viable solutions to difficult questions of faith inflames old tensions between theology and classical traditions. That antagonism stretches as far back as Tertullian (160–220), who posed the infamously xenophobic question: "What does Athens have to do with Jerusalem?"[144] Tertullian's question finds its most sustained answer in St. Augustine's (354–430) *De Doctrina Christiana* (397), a text that attempts to reconcile Christian hermeneutics with classical rhetoric and demonstrates to the Christian world how it stands to benefit from developing rules for interpreting scripture. In some ways, the stand-off between Goeze and Lessing restages this antagonism in an entirely new context. Not all theologians at the time adopted Goeze's hardline opposition to secular hermeneutics. Many reconsidered the efficacy of their own communicative practices and hermeneutic methodologies by contemplating the possibility of embracing classical traditions and the newly emerging field of aesthetics to regain influence over a public gradually turning to literature for spiritual and moral guidance.[145] One of the more interesting and relevant examples of this can be found in the theological writings of Johann Gottfried Herder (1744–1803), who already in 1769 applied an organic conception of truth to his homiletics, one that would "live on in the hearts and minds" of his congregation rather than be unreflectively relegated to memory and prejudice: "mein Wort

[144] Quoted from Kennedy, A. Georg, *Classical Rhetoric & Its Christian & Secular Tradition from Ancient to Modern Times*, second revised and enlarged ed., Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999.
[145] See, for instance, Heinrich Philipp Schuler's *Geschichte der Veränderungen des Geschmacks im Predigen* (1794).

müsse im Gedächtnis und was noch mehr ist, im Herzen meiner Zuhörer leben […] Predigten müssen gehalten sein sie müssen lebendig gefaßt, sie müssen im Herzen und nicht auf dem Papier bleiben, sie müssen ewigen Eindruck nachlassen"[146] [my word must be impressed upon the memory, and what is still more it must live in the hearts of my audience […] Sermons must be given and they must be composed in a lively manner, they must be inscribed on the heart and not simply remain on the page, they must leave behind an eternal impression]. More conservative theologians fell in line with Goeze by seeking to enforce stricter censorship laws to curb the proliferation of what they perceived to be hostile secular values.[147] By the end of the fragment controversy, Goeze and his constituency successfully appealed to the duke of Braunschweig to have Lessing's publishing rights revoked, citing that his criticisms of religion threatened the well-being of the public. While the duke's censorship might have brought the fragment controversy to its official end, it continued in the form of Lessing's *Nathan* play, which Friedrich Schlegel (1772–1829) aptly described as "die Fortsetzung vom Anti-Götze, Numero Zwölf"[148] [the twelfth installment of the *Anti-Goeze* polemic].

Ironically, Schlegel would go on to judge Lessing's theological writings (especially their fragmentary style) as a true expression of genius, while failing to acknowledge how closely his polemical writings adhered to the prescribed rules of classical rhetoric.[149] Nevertheless, the Romantics viewed Lessing's passionate approach to theology as a synthesis of art and religion,

[146] See Herder's "Abschiedsrede von Riga," in Herder, Johann, *Werke in zehn Bänden: Theologische Schriften*, Band 9, hrsg. von Christoph Bultmann und Thomas Zippert, Frankfurt am Main: Deutsche Klassiker Verlag, 1994, p. 62. Translation mine.
[147] Johann Melchior Goeze successfully appealed directly to the Duke of Braunschweig in 1778 to censor Lessing's theological writings.
[148] See Schlegel, "Über Lessing," p. 67.
[149] Ibid., p. 60. See also Moore, Evelyn K., *The Passions of Rhetoric: Lessing's Theory of Argument and the German Enlightenment*, Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1993, pp. xi-xix.

one that would eventually culminate in the idea of "Kunstreligion," which becomes developed more fully in the literary works of Wackenroder and the religious treatises of Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834). Yet it was not Lessing's style alone that garnered the attention of the Romantics, but his radical observations on the nature and limitations of historical evidence, which, as we will see in the next chapter, had a profound influence on Novalis. More than any other romantic, Novalis sought to build on and improve Lessing's insights into the relationship between poetry and history.[150] Above all, Novalis wanted to elaborate the way in which Lessing deployed the creative imagination to transfigure the contingencies of history into meaningful narratives that could facilitate subjective religious conversion.

The status of history within theological discourse was indeed central to the fragment controversy, and Lessing accused enlightenment theologians of abusing biblical history by constructing artificial "proofs" designed to assure religious subjects of the credibility of their faith, that their bond to Christianity rested on sound truths (rather than mere feeling). This meant that revealed knowledge, or knowledge acquired through reports of divinely inspired prophecies and miracles, was to be grounded by reason. Lessing became highly critical of this effort, arguing that,

> [d]ie Kanzeln, anstatt von der Gefangennehmung der Vernunft unter den Gehorsam des Glaubens zu ertönen, ertönen nun von nichts, als von dem innigen Bande zwischen Vernunft und Glauben. Glaube ist durch Wunder und Zeichen bekräftigte Vernunft, und Vernunft raisonnierender Glaube geworden. Die ganze geoffenbarte Religion ist nichts, als eine erneuerte Sanction der Religion der Vernunft.[151]
>
> [The pulpits no longer resound with the need to subordinate reason to faith; they now resound only with talk of the intimate bond between reason and faith. Faith has become reason reinforced by miracles and portents, and reason has become

[150] See Saul, Nicholas, *History and Poetry in Novalis and in the Tradition of the German Enlightenment*, London: Institute of Germanic Studies, University of London, 1984.
[151] Lessing, *Werke und Briefe*, Band 8, hrsg. von Arno Schilson, Frankfurt am Main: Deutsche Klassiker Verlag, 1989, p. 316.

faith reinforced by rational thought. The whole of revealed religion is no more than a renewed sanctioning of the religion of reason.]

Lessing was fighting against a generation of theologians who eclectically made use of the insights in Leibniz's *Theodicy* (1709). Above all, theologians got swept up in the drive to set reason and faith on an equal footing,[152] which, as Lessing suggests, found popular expression on the pulpit. However, Leibniz's vindication of God from the charge of having allowed evil to exist in the world inadvertently suggests that reason is needed to explain the "will" of the Creator.[153] This desire to "justify the ways of god to men"[154] in the *Theodicy* is, therefore, strikingly similar to what we have already seen in Klopstock's amplification of scripture in *Der Messias*. Of course, the crucial difference is that Leibniz called on metaphysics rather than poetry to serve as the handmaiden of religion, but nevertheless there is a shared methodology at work. Loosely following the path that Leibniz set out, enlightenment theologians developed several strategies that reflect the apparent harmony of revelation and reason. These strategies included using biblical paraphrastics to reconcile scripture with popular morality, using advanced knowledge of ancient languages to challenge the authority of certain translations or editions of the bible, and interrogating the history of the Church and its dogma in order to distinguish "true" from "false" articles of faith.[155]

[152] See my Chapter 1, Section 2, or Leibniz's *Theodicy*, § 39: "But since reason is a gift of God, even as faith is, contention between them would cause God to contend against God; and if the objections of reason against any article of faith are insoluble, then it must be said that this alleged article will be false and not revealed: this will be a chimera of the human mind, and the triumph of this faith will be capable of comparison with bonfires lighted after a defeat."
[153] For an analysis of this in the context of Leibniz see Neiman, Susan, *Evil in Modern Thought: An Alternative History of Philosophy*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015.
[154] Of course, Milton's *Paradise Lost* is also apart of this constellation of science, literature, and religion.
[155] See Aner, Karl, *Die Theologie der Lessingzeit*, Hildesheim: G. Olms, 1964.

Perhaps the most popular strategy among theologians of the 1760s was the historical-critical exegesis of the biblical letter, which attempted to humanize and rationalize certain articles of faith without reference to church dogma. For instance, Johann Friedrich Wilhelm Jerusalem (1709–1789), whose son Karl contributed to the fragment controversy and tragically became the biographical model for the protagonist in Goethe's *Werther*,[156] challenged Augustine's dismal account of original sin in his *Betrachtungen über die vornehmsten Wahrheiten der Religion* (1768). For Augustine (and Luther) human nature will always be ontologically corrupt and unable to actualize virtuous life without the aid of divine grace. Against this Jerusalem protests: "Wo steht es, daß die Menschen ihres angeborenen Verderbens wegen verdammt werden sollen?"[157] [Where does it say that mankind is to be condemned because of its innate corruption?]. In this case, the goal was to use scripture rather than the dogma produced from the symbolic books[158] of the Early Church to give human agency (i.e. free will) a more dignified status with respect to the doctrine of original sin. Jerusalem made the case that to be born without virtue in no way means that human

[156] Karl Jerusalem (1747–1772) wrote several essays that responded to Reimarus' fragment *Von Duldung der Deisten*, an essay that Lessing published which calls for greater tolerance for rational inquiry into theology. Lessing acknowledges Karl Jerusalem's unfortunate suicide that was the real-life analogue to Goethe's main character in his epistolary novel *Werther*. Of Karl Jerusalem, Lessing wrote: "Der Verfasser dieser Aufsätze war der einzige Sohn des würdigen Mannes, den alle, welchen die Religion eine Angelegenheit ist, so verehren und lieben. Seine Laufbahn war kurz; sein Lauf schnell. Doch *lange* leben ist nicht *viel* leben. Und wenn viel denken allein, viel leben ist: so war seiner Jahre nur für uns zu wenig" [The author of these essays was the only son of a worthy man whom everyone involved with the office of religion reveres and loves. His career was short; his run fast. But to live long is not to have lived much. And if much thinking alone is to live much: then it is only for us that his years were too few]. In Lessing, *Werke*, Band 8, Frankfurt am Main: Deutsche Klassiker Verlag, p. 137. Translation mine.

[157] Jerusalem, Johann Friedrich Wilhelm, *Schriften*, Band IV, hrsg. von Andreas Urs Sommer, Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 2007, p. 433. Translation mine.

[158] Symbolic books [symbolische Bücher] refer to works written by theologians of the early and later Church, or works that are not part of the biblical canon, yet their influence is so far reaching that it rivals the authority of the biblical authors themselves. Examples of these works would include the writings of Augustine and, for the Protestant Church, Luther. Neologians debated how much authority these books should have in relation to actual scripture.

nature lacks an innate capacity for virtue. That capacity, according to Jerusalem, manifests itself across history, which serves as a kind of eye-witness testifying to humanity's constant struggle to regain its lost state of benevolence.[159] In this way, Jerusalem's pelegianic response to Augustine makes use of historical observations to revise and modernize Church dogma.

Echoes of Jerusalem's argument also found expression in secular literature. Friedrich Nicolai's satirical, shandyesque novel *Das Leben und Meinungen des Sebaldus Nothankers* (1773–76), gave voice to a host of theological arguments that were in circulation during the fragment controversy. For instance, he puts Jerusalem's reading of original sin into the mouth of the novel's protagonist, who argues against the Augustinian conception of original sin with a fellow traveller. Sebaldus protests: "Wir besitzen Kräfte zum Guten. Wer dies leugnen wollte, würde Gottes Schöpfung schänden, der uns so viel Vollkommenheiten gegeben hat. Ohne den Einfluß einer übernatürlich wirkenden Gnade *können* wir Tugend und edle Taten ausüben."[160] [We posses the capacity for virtue. Whoever wanted to deny this would offend God's creation, which has given us so many perfections. We *can* exercise virtue and noble deeds without the influence of supernatural grace.] In their respective roles as theologian and novelist, Jerusalem and Nicolai demonstrate a shared interest in articulating a conception of original sin that does not refer to the necessity of divine intervention (i.e. grace), but instead refers to the necessity of Bildung as the primary means of sharpening mankind's perceived capacity for virtue.

Of course, this is an insight that Lessing fully endorses, yet his method of harmonizing religion with popular morality involves an appeal to the spirit (i.e. religion's underlying ethos),

[159] For an analysis of the theological context out of which Jerusalem's argument emerged see Aner, Karl: "Der Übergang von Wolffianismus zur Neologie," in *Die Theologie der Lessingzeit*, Hildesheim: G. Olms, 1964, pp. 144–201.
[160] Nicholai, Friedrich, *Das Leben und die Meinungen des Herrn Magister Sebaldus Nothanker*, Hamburg: Tredition Classics, 2012, viertes Buch, erster Abschnitt. Translation mine.

which dispenses with the aspiration to build a fully coherent system of religion from the logos of the biblical letter. In other words, whereas Jerusalem appeals to the minutiae of scripture to present an epistemic argument that can replace the institutionalized doctrine of original sin, Lessing rises above local skirmishes by developing what will eventually be defined as a moral proof by thinkers like Kant and Fichte.[161] This proof considers the efficacy of religion's ethos within historical development as more vital to the "truth" of religion than any logical demonstration. That is to say, it considers how well the ethos of religion satisfies the practical needs of individuals and communities at a given historical moment: "Was kümmert es mich, ob die Sage falsch oder wahr ist: die Früchte sind trefflich […] Diese Früchte sähe ich vor mir reifen und gereift, und ich sollte mich damit nicht sättigen dürfen?"[162] [What does it matter to me whether the old legend is true or false? The fruits [i.e. miracles and fulfilled prophecies] are excellent […] And were I to see these fruits ripening and ripened before me, am I not supposed to eat my fill of them?] This language of fruit and digestion, or consumption rather than reflection, prioritizes confessional systems of faith that turn on pragmatism. Here, in Lessing's *Beweis*, which functions as a manifesto against both the scientific effort to prove or disprove the truth of revealed knowledge (Reimarus) and the dogmatic denial that revealed knowledge poses any kind of epistemic obstacle for modern religious subjects (Schumann), the contours of a moral proof begin to emerge in Lessing's argument, which concludes on a wish: "Ich schließe, und wünsche: möchte doch alle, welche das Evangelium Johannis trennt, das Testament Johannis wieder vereinigen! Es ist freilich apokryphisch, dieses Testament: aber darum nicht weniger göttlich"[163] [I shall end with this wish: may all those whom

[161] Kant and Fichte will develop moral proof arguments in their respective practical philosophies.
[162] Lessing, *Werke und Briefe*, Band 8, hrsg. von Arno Schilson, Frankfurt am Main: Deutsche Klassiker Verlag, 1989, p. 354.
[163] Ibid., p. 445.

the Gospel of St. John divides be reunited by St John's Testament! It is admittedly apocryphal, this testament—but not for that reason any the less divine]. Lessing traces the cause of sectarian divisions within Christianity to the Gospel of John (1:1–14: "In the beginning was the Word") and hopes that the Testament of John can undo that damage and serve as a unifying force in the future. Lessing's *Das Testament Johannis* is a dialogical text that repeats over and over again the most essential teaching of Christianity: "Kinderchen, liebt euch!" [Little children, love one another]. St. John, who was famous for his eloquence, reportedly kept reducing the length of his sermons towards the end of his life until finally he boiled it down to just several words suggesting that the core teachings of scripture revolve around the Christian concept of agape, or charitable love. The situation in the eighteenth century could not be more different. Here one finds theologians, philosophers, and literary figures all hastening to amplify the word of God to make it correspond more closely to popular morality. In describing the Testament of St. John as a foil to the Gospel of John, Lessing positions himself against his contemporaries.

During the fragment controversy the main article of faith being disputed was the doctrine of eternal salvation, which relied on the historical "fact" of Christ's resurrection as narrated in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. As far as Lessing was concerned, this was the place in scripture where theologians were most dishonest insofar as they wanted more than sufficient reason to believe in Christ's resurrection; they wanted to prove it with certainty. This became glaringly obvious in the fragments of Hermann Samuel Reimarus (1694–1768), who systematically set out to prove that the only thing "certain" about Christ's resurrection was that it never happened, at least not in the way that religious institutions led their subjects to believe. Reimarus was a former student of Christian Wolff, an underground deist, and a talented philologist. He also wrote some of the most devastating biblical commentaries on record. For example, in his

fragments he questioned whether or not the Old Testament should even qualify as religion considering its "immoral" content;[164] used data about the mortality rates of children to problematize the missionary work of the Church and its policy of condemning to hell all unbaptized souls (even if they are "innocent" children);[165] described the doctrine of original sin as a shield protecting the Church against rational criticism;[166] used statistical analysis to discredit the miracles described in Exodus (e.g. Moses' parting of the Red Sea);[167] and made use of legal conventions to undermine the veracity of witness testimony in the New Testament.[168] Lessing's publication of Reimarus' fragments was strategic. If rational theologians continue to cross-examine the Gospel narratives with the intent to prove the veracity of Christ's resurrection (by showing that the particular details and testimony in the four Gospels do not contradict each other), then they should also be prepared to embrace Reimarus' skepticism as their own[169] because his views represents the end game of rational theology. On the one hand, Lessing agreed with Reimarus' underlying premise that the evidence grounding the doctrine of salvation—the testimony and historical reports of fulfilled prophecies and miracles—is shot through with

[164] See Reimarus' *Viertes Fragment: Daß die Bücher A.T. nicht geschrieben worden, eine Religion zu Offenbaren*. In: Lessing. *Werke und Briefe*, Band 8, hrsg. von Arno Schilson, Frankfurt am Main: Deutsche Klassiker Verlag, 1989, pp. 246-276.
[165] Ibid., Reimarus' *Zweites Fragment: Unmöglichkeit einer Offenbarung, die alle Menschen auf eine gegründete Art glauben könnten.* pp. 189-236.
[166] Ibid., Reimarus' *Erstes Fragment: Von Verschreiung der Vernunft auf den Kanzeln.* pp. 175-188.
[167] Ibid., Reimarus' *Drittes Fragment: Durchgang der Israeliten durchs rote Meer*. pp. 236-246.
[168] Ibid., Reimarus' *Fünftes Fragment: Über die Auferstehungsgeschichte*. pp. 277-311.
[169] Ibid., Reimarus' *Fünftes Fragment: Über die Auferstehungsgeschichte*, pp. 277-311. Here Reimarus compares the testimony of the four Evangelists and finds multiple grounds to believe that Christ's resurrection was a ruse. For instance, in the Gospel of Matthew he finds evidence to suggest that Joseph of Arimathea (who owned the land where Christ was buried) struck a deal with the apostles and gave the Roman guards the wrong location in which to guard Christ's body so that the apostles only had to move the stone in the middle of the night and could then report that Christ had risen from the dead even though his body was at a different location.

pernicious contradictions. Lessing was very explicit about this in his response to Johann Heinrich Ress, writing: "Ich gab den Vordersatz zu; und leugnete die Folge"[170] [I accepted the premise, but I rejected the conclusion]. On the other hand, Lessing was not prepared to abandon himself to the bleak conclusion that a confession of faith is tantamount to endorsing a lie. Instead, he strategically described Reimarus as the "ideal opponent of religion" and published the anonymous fragments so that an "ideal defender of religion" might emerge; someone who could see beyond the "hairsplitting interpretations" of the letter and acknowledge that "die Seligkeit nicht an die mühsame Erforschung dieser [die Bücher der Offenbarung], sondern an die herzliche Annahme jener gebunden sei"[171] [salvation is not tied to the laborious study of the books of revelation, but rather to the heartfelt acceptance of revelation].

In his *Gegensätze des Herausgebers* Lessing included nearly half of the *Erziehung* fragments, and the following one identifies the crux of the problem for enlightenment theologians like Reimarus:

> Aber jedes Elementarbuch ist nur für ein gewisses Alter. Das ihm entwachsene Kind länger, als die Meinung gewesen, dabei zu verweilen, ist schädlich. Denn um dieses auf eine nur einigermaßen nützliche Art tun zu können, muß man mehr hineinlegen, als darin liegt; mehr hineintragen, als es fassen kann. Man muß die Anspielungen und Fingerzeige zu viel suchen und machen, die Allegorien zu genau ausschütteln, die Beispiele zu umständlich deuten, die Worte zu stark pressen. Das gibt dem Kinde einen kleinlichen, schiefen, spitzfindigen Verstand; das macht es geheimnisreich, abergläubisch, voll Verachtung gegen alles Faßliche und Leichte.[172]
>
> [But every primer is only for a certain age. To continue using it for longer than intended with a child who has outgrown it is harmful. For in order to do this in a useful way, one must read more into it than is present and introduce more than it

[170] See Lessing's *Eine Duplik*.
[171] Lessing, *Gedanken über die Herrnhuter*, in *Werke in drei Bänden*, München: Deutsche Taschenbuch Verlag, 2003, pp. 271–80. Translation mine.
[172] Lessing, *Werke und Briefe: Zur Geschichte und Literatur*, Band 8, hrsg. von Arno Schilson, Frankfurt am Main: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1989, p. 346.

> can hold. One must look for and invent too many allusions and pointers, extract too much from the allegories, interpret the examples too circumstantially, and press the words too hard. This gives the child a petty, warped, and hairsplitting understanding; it makes the child secretive, superstitious, and full of contempt for everything comprehensible and straightforward.]

Here Lessing speaks of primers [Elementarbücher] and pointers [Fingerzeige], which represent the machinery of religious education. The primers refer to the Old and New Testaments, each of which contain pointers or obscure, indeterminate elements that incentivize readers to further development an understanding of those pointers in order to advance to the next primer. In other words, one primer prepares the way" to the next, and Reimarus' insatiable demand for testimony purified of all contradiction obstructs his ability to advance to the next primer. According to Lessing, the doctrine of salvation was already latent (i.e. it held the status of a pointer) within Mosaic law, which, if obeyed, promised to secure a life of happiness (or more accurately a life without punishment), and it took many centuries before the concept of salvation evolved to include the promise of happiness in another life yet to come. For Lessing, the eighteenth century had grown up enough to realize that this promise should be thought of in experiential terms rather than in terms of transcendence.[173] He argues, "Ich will es den Gottesgelehrten gern zugeben, daß aber doch das *Seligmachende* in den verschiedenen Religionen immer das *Nämliche* müsse gewesen sein: wenn sie mir nur hinwiederum zugeben, daß darum nicht immer die Menschen den *nämlichen Begriff* damit müssen verbunden haben"[174] [I will gladly concede to the theologians that the *salvation element* in the different religions must always have been the *same*—provided they will concede to me in turn that people need not therefore always have had the *same conception* of it].

[173] Lessing, *Erziehung*, § 85–90. To think of salvation in experiential terms also introduces a political dimension into Lessing's theology.
[174] Lessing, *Gegensätze des Herausgebers*, p. 345.

By building a transformative mechanism into his conception of religious education it becomes, much to the chagrin of orthodox theologians, essential for revealed knowledge to be subjected to free and open criticism. Without this, revelation is in danger of becoming a fossilized object of faith. For Lessing, by contrast, the point is to think of revelation as perpetual so that theologians like Reimarus might begin to imagine how the doctrine of salvation could still hold value for religious subjects in the eighteenth century.

Another major site of conflict during the fragment controversy involved the capacity of historical evidence to serve as the foundation of confessional systems. Many enlightenment theologians took recourse in history to prove that eternal salvation was a very real and legitimate promise, and a promise that reason could show to be universally and eternally applicable. On this particular issue Lessing never showed signs of equivocation: "zufällige Geschichtswahrheiten können der Beweis von notwendigen Vernunftswahrheiten nie warden"[175] [contingent truths of history can never become the proof of necessary truths of reason]. Here, in his *Beweis*, Lessing vigorously defends the claim that contingent truths of history are mediated through testimony and reports, which, means that the force of those truths will always be weaker than knowledge obtained through direct empirical observation. To this effect he writes:

> daß Nachrichten von erfüllten Weissagungen nicht erfüllte Weisagungen; daß Nachrichten von Wundern nicht Wunder sind. *Diese*, die vor meinen Augen erfüllten Weissagungen, die vor meinen Augen geschehenen Wunder, wirken *unmittelbar*. *Jene* aber, die Nachrichten von erfüllten Weissagungen und Wunder, sollen durch ein *Medium* wirken, dass ihnen alle Kraft benimmt.[176]
>
> [It is because reports of fulfilled prophecies are not fulfilled prophecies; because reports of miracles are not miracles. The *latter*—prophecies fulfilled before my eyes and miracles that happen before my eyes—have an *immediate* effect. But the

[175] Lessing, *Über den Beweis des Geistes und der Kraft*.
[176] Ibid.

former—reports of fulfilled prophecies and of miracles—have to act through a medium which deprives them of all their force.]

This passage recalls the problem of doubting Thomas, who symbolically emerges on the stage of the fragment controversy as the central obstacle for modern faith. Implied here is Lessing's critique of enlightenment theology that treats the letter of the bible as if it were an object of natural science. For Lessing, as for Vico, Gadamer, and others, the "proofs" of history will always be qualitatively different from those of the natural sciences, whose methodologies demand the immediacy of empirical observation to arrive at "universal" or "transhistorical" knowledge.[177] By contrast, human sciences [Geisteswissenschaften] like history are founded upon an ideal of consensus, which has the capacity to evolve over time as new bodies of research and insight are introduced into a given scholarly environment. Historical truth, in other words, cannot aspire beyond the particular and the contingent, a fact that effectively denies any Church's claim to universal truth. At best, one might argue in Kantian terms that the promise of eternal salvation is nothing more than an idea of reason and the "historical" reports of Christ's resurrection are individual attempts to translate this idea of reason into an aesthetic idea (i.e. each gospel is an attempt to give concrete, sensible form to the idea of eternal salvation).

Lessing, however, is not interested in developing a philosophically rigorous vocabulary to make his argument about the status of history within theological inquiry. Instead, he returns to the

[177] See Vico, Giambattista. *The First New Science*. Edited by Leon. Pompa, Cambridge University Press, 2002; Gadamer, Hans-Georg, *Wahrheit und Methode*, Tübingen: Mohr, 1960; and White, Hayden, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990. See also Kuhn, Thomas S., *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963, which uses the history of science to challenge the assumption that natural science is capable of securing universal/transhistorical truths.

Early Church Fathers and develops a hypothesis about the four Evangelists that makes use of the "regula fidei," or rule of faith, as articulated in Paul's Epistle to the Romans.[178] In the Epistle, Paul declares that "we have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith."[179] In other words, if John's "gift" was his talent for eloquence and Paul's was his ability to construct arguments that could appeal to potential Christian converts, then each should put their particular talents to work in their individual accounts of Christ's life and teachings. Lessing represents the Evangelists as human historians with discrete rhetorical skills—rather than divinely inspired historians—to both discredit orthodox notions of scripture's inerrancy[180] and to disarm rational theology's concerns about the presence of contradictions in scripture. According to Lessing, religion existed prior to the bible. In fact, he argues "Die Religion ist nicht wahr, weil die Evangelisten und Apostel sie lehrten: sondern sie lehrten sie, weil sie wahr ist"[181] [religion is not true because the evangelists and apostles taught it; on the contrary, they taught it because it is true]. The Evangelists were only inspired to write anything down *after* they developed their convictions about the significance of Christ's life. Lessing further describes the rule of faith in his *Notwendige Antwort*. This text was directed at Goeze, who rejected Lessing's hypothetical argument that religion could survive even if scripture had been lost or never existed at all:

> Diese Regula fidei war, ehe noch ein einziges Buch des Neuen Testaments existierte. Diese Regula fidei ist sogar älter als die *Kirche*. Denn die Absicht, zu

[178] Unfortunately Lessing never completed his argument, but we only have fragments of it in his *Neue Hypothese über die Evangelisten als bloss menschliche Geschichtscreiber betrachtet* [*New Hypothesis on the Evangelists as Merely Human Historians*.]
[179] See Paul's Epistle to the Romans, 12:6.
[180] Goeze, for instance, believed in the infallibility of every letter in the Bible on the grounds that the Evangelists were divinely inspired. For an analysis of this theory see Allision's *Lessing and the Enlightenment*, especially chapter 3, section IV.
[181] Lessing's *Gegensätze des Herausgebers*.

> welcher; die Anordnung, unter welcher eine Gemeinde zusammen gebracht wird, ist ja wohl früher als die Gemeinde […] Diese Regula fidei also ist der Fels, auf welchen die Kirche Christi erbauet worden, und *nicht die Schrift*.
>
> [This regula fidei was in existence before a single book of the New Testament existed. This regula fidei is even older than the Church. For the intention for which, and the rules under which, a congregation is brought together must certainly be prior to the congregation itself […] Thus this regula fidei, and not the Scriptures, is the rock on which the Church of Christ was built.]

The rule of faith, therefore, adheres not to the letter of religion, but to its spirit, which, again, refers to the ethos that emerged from Christ's actions and his teachings. For Lessing, as for the Early Church, the letter of religion only performs the function of missionary work and it should be judged based on its efficacy rather than the logical consistency of a closed system.

In his final analysis, Lessing knew that the historical narratives of the Evangelists were not capable of shouldering the weight of "eternal" truths, and so he called for a new kind of faith that could rest on "Zeit angemessenere Beweise"[182] [proof more appropriate to his time]. This new faith was to be grounded on the spirit of religion:

> Denn da dieses Zeugnis [des heiligen Geistes] sich doch nur bei denjenigen Büchern und Stellen der Schrift mehr oder weniger äußern kann, welche auf unsere geistliche Besserung mehr oder weniger abzwecken: was ist billiger, als nur solcherlei Bücher und Stellen der Bibel den Geist der Bibel zu nennen? Ich denke sogar, es streife ein wenig an Gotteslästerung, wenn man behaupten wollte, daß die Kraft des H. Geistes sich eben sowhol an dem Geschlechtsregister der Nachkommen des Essau beim Moses, als an der Bergpredigt Jesu beim Matthäus, wirksam erzeigen könne.[183]
>
> [Testimony [of the spirit] can only express itself more or less in those books and passages of Scripture which aim more or less at our spiritual improvement: what is more reasonable than to call only those books and passages "the spirit" of the Bible? I even think it would be verging on blasphemy to assert that the power of the Holy

[182] Lessing, *Über den Beweis des Geistes und der Kraft*. In: *Werke und Briefe*, Band 8, hrsg. von Arno Schilson, Frankfurt am Main: Deutsche Klassiker Verlag, 1989, p. 440).
[183] Lessing, *Werke in drei Bänden*, München: Deutsche Taschenbuch Verlag, 2003, Band III, p. 453.

Spirit manifests itself as much in the genealogical tables of Esau's descendants in Genesis as in the Sermon on the Mount in St Matthew's Gospel.]

For Lessing, the spirit of religion aligns with the teleological goals of Bildung, which effectively emancipates modern faith from simply being a question of obeying the statutory elements of scripture. But before turning to Lessing's polemical arguments against enlightenment theology's Buchstabe fetish and before analyzing the aesthetic structures in his theology in the following sections, careful attention must be given to his conception of spirit [Geist]. It is, after all, the spirit that offers protection from the devastating criticism of Reimarus' *Fragments*. To avoid any confusion with respect to an idea that has produced much, I will put my cards on the table first and then defer my analysis to subsequent sections of this chapter. I take the idea of Geist to be imaginative: not transcendental, not suspended in a "pure," ethereal realm impervious to the effects of time and space: it is something that must be taught, instilled, nurtured, and argued about in each and every generation or else it risks becoming a meaningless petrification—a memorized catechism or an absolute truth. To be sure, there is something "constant" to Lessing's conception of the spirit. This would be the "regula fidei,"[184] or the ethos[185] represented in the stories about Christ that were designed to improve the practical life of a given religious community *through a*

[184] In his *Nötige Antwort auf eine sehr unnötige Frage*—a text that clarifies how the spirit of religion precedes its letter—Lessing claims that it was not scripture, but the regula fidei upon which the church was originally built: "Diese regula fidei ist der Fels, auf welchen die Kirche Christi erbauet worden, und *nicht die Schrift*." Lessing, *Werke in drei Bänden*, München: Deutsche Taschenbuch Verlag, 2003, Band III, p. 549.

[185] Lessing will refer to the regula fidei as the "essential content, rules, and intentions" (ibid. p. 549, §1, §4). My reading is indebted to John Smith's *Dialogues between Faith and Reason: The Death and Return of God in Modern German Thought*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011. Smith refers to Lessing's spirit as an ethos and uses it as a stepping-stone to Kant's moral proof of God's existence that, in one stroke, makes the theoretical proof obsolete. Smith does not explore the specific details of the fragment controversy, though his reading of the "as if" in Kant's categorical imperative as aesthetic compliments my analysis of Lessing (see below).

variety of means. The prophecies, miracles, histories, poetry, and arguments scattered throughout the bible are merely expressions of that ethos, to be judged neither by how well they adhere to subsequent doctrines and dogma nor by categories of "true" and "false,"[186] but on how well they penetrate into moral fabric of society and individuals. Efficacy, then, becomes just as much the point of departure for judging and interpreting the written traditions as it is for creating the narratives in the first place. With this in mind, I believe that Lessing's theology of spirit creates the conditions of possibility for a lively faith to develop within modern religious discourse.

II. The Theological Import of Lessing's *Laokoon*

> Ich bin nun überzeugt, daß der höchste Akt der Vernunft, der, in dem sie alle Ideen umfaßt, ein ästhetischer Akt ist und daß Wahrheit und Güte nur in der Schönheit verschwistert sind. Der Philosoph muß ebensoviel ästhetische Kraft besitzen als der Dichter. Die Menschen ohne ästhetischen Sinn sind unsere Buchstabenphilosophen. Die Philosophie des Geistes ist eine ästhetische Philosophie.[187]
>
> [I am now convinced that the highest act of reason, by encompassing all ideas, is an aesthetic act, and that truth and goodness are only siblings in beauty. The philosopher must possess as much aesthetic power as the poet. These people without an aesthetic sense are our philosophers of the letter. The philosophy of spirit is an aesthetic philosophy.]

[186] Sequence is always important for Lessing: "Diese Regula fidei ist sogar älter als die *Kirche*. Denn die Absicht, zu welcher; die Anordnung, unter welcher eine Gemeinde zusammengebracht wird, ist ja wohl früher als die Gemeinde" [This regula fidei is even older than the church. For the intention to which; the arrangement under which a church is brought together is probably earlier than the church.] Ibid.

[187] Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich. *Frühe Schriften*. 1. Aufl., Suhrkamp, 1986, p. 235. The English translation of this passage is attributed to Hölderlin in Bernstein, J.M. *Classic and Romantic German Aesthetics*. Ed. J.M. Berstein. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003. p. 186.

—Hegel, Das älteste Systemprogramm des deutschen Idealismus, 1796/7

The question of why Lessing's theology should be described as "aesthetic" requires some attention. There are several reasons why speaking of aesthetic theology is particularly apt when thinking through Lessing's religious writings. For this section, however, I will limit myself to demonstrating how the aesthetic "Denkungsart" [mode of thinking] of Lessing's *Laokoon* (1766) is structurally analogous to a mode of thinking he introduces into modern theology.

At first glance, the only common denominator between Lessing's *Laokoon* and his religious writings appears to be the polemic. His *Laokoon* waged an attack against Winckelmann's highly influential treatise *Gedancken über die Nachahmung der Griechischen Werke in der Mahlerey und Bildhauerkunst* (1755), which argued, paradoxically, that the only way for modern art to become "inimitable" is for artists to imitate the Greeks. The paradox is resolved once it becomes clear that by "imitation" Winckelmann refers not to any individual works of Greek art, but rather to their methodologies.[188] In any case, for Winckelmann Greek culture symbolized the fountainhead of good taste, and it was there that modernity should develop an aesthetic theory: "Der gute Geschmack, welcher sich mehr und mehr durch die Welt ausbreitet, hat sich angefangen zuerst unter dem Griechischen Himmel zu bilden"[189] [good taste, which is spreading more and more across the world, first established itself under a Greek sky]. According to Winckelmann, all Greek masterpieces express "noble simplicity" and "serene sublimity":

[188] See Beiser, Frederick, *Diotima's Children: German Aesthetic Rationalism from Leibniz to Lessing*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2009, p. 163f. Translation mine.
[189] Winckelmann, Johann J., *Gedancken über die Nachahmung der Griechischen Wercke in der Mahlerey und Bildhauer-Kunst; Sendschreiben; Erläuterung*, ed. Max Kunze, Stuttgart: Reclam, 2013, p. 9. Translation mine.

> Das allgemeine vorzügliche Kennzeichen der Griechischen Meisterstücke ist endlich eine edle Einfalt, und eine stille Größe, so wohl in der Stellung als im Ausdruck. So wie die Tiefe des Meers allezeit ruhig bleibt, die Oberfläche mag noch so wüten, eben so zeiget der Ausdruck in den Figuren der Griechen bei allen Leidenschaften eine grosse und gesetzte Seele.[190]
>
> [The ideal characteristics of Greek masterpieces are: noble simplicity and serene sublimity, just as much in disposition as in expression. Just as the depth of the sea remains at all times calm while its surface rages, so too do the expressions of Greek sculpture show a great and settled soul in the midst of great passions.]

As far as Winckelmann was concerned noble simplicity and serene sublimity, which index the stoic tradition, were ideals manifestly written onto the face (and body) of the Laocoön statue. Decisive for Lessing's polemic was Winckelmann's observation that the Greek statue contained no trace of the outward horror described by Virgil in his *Aeneid*. The statue, Winckelmann writes, "hebet kein schreckliches Geschrey, wie Virgil von seinem Laokoon singet."[191] [raises no horrible scream like the Laocoön of whom Virgil sings]. Whereas Virgil's poetry vividly describes a scene in which Laocoön screams in agony as he witnesses the violent death of his children, the Greek sculptor, according to Winckelmann, chose to represent the father's capacity to endure in the face of overwhelming agony: "sein Elend gehet uns bis an die Seele; aber wir wünschen, wie dieser grosse Mann, das Elend ertragen zu können"[192] [his misery drills down to our soul, but we hope to be able to bear the misery, like this great man]. In other words, the statue reinforces Winckelmann's claim that noble simplicity and serene sublimity form the ideological foundation of Greek taste.

Yet, for Lessing the sculptor's decision to mitigate the agony described by Virgil had nothing to do with the ethical ideals of noble simplicity or serene sublimity. Rather, it was the result of aesthetic deliberations over the medium of sculpture. The sculptor knew that he needed

[190] Ibid., p. 27–28.
[191] Ibid., p. 28. Translation mine.
[192] Ibid. Translation mine.

to mitigate the pathos of the poem if he wanted his sculpture to facilitate aesthetic pleasure and arouse the audience's sympathy, that is, to fulfill the function of art. According to Lessing, Winckelmann provided "the wrong reasons" to justify his observation: "Nur in dem Grunde, welchen Herr Winckelmann dieser Weisheit gibt, in der Allgemeinheit der Regel, die er aus diesem Grunde herleitet, wage ich es, anderer Meinung zu sein"[193] [Only in the reasons, which Winckelmann provided for his argument, that is, in the general rule which he draws from these reasons, do I venture being of a different opinion than he]. Had the sculptor not mitigated the pathos described by Virgil, his artwork would have become a source of displeasure [ekelhaft] for its audience: "er [der Bildhauer] mußte Schreien in Seufzen mildern; nicht weil das Schreien eine unedle Seele verrät, sondern weil er das Gesicht auf eine ekelhafte Weise verstellet"[194] [the sculptor had to mitigate the scream into sighs; not because screaming betrays an ignoble soul, but rather because it disfigures the face in an unpleasing manner].

A detailed analysis of their arguments exceeds the purpose of the present investigation. However, if one situates Lessing's response within a larger constellation of eighteenth-century aesthetics, his approach appears relatively singular in its call for greater attention to what distinguishes the arts from each other. In no way does Lessing aspire to a general aesthetic theory like Baumgarten had done in the 1750s or Sulzer would do in the 1770s:[195] "Wenn mein Raisonnment nicht so bündig ist als das Baumgartensche, so werden doch meine Beispiele mehr nach der Quelle schmecken"[196] [If my argument is not as systematic as Baumgarten's, at least my

[193] Lessing, *Laokoon*, in *Werke in drei Bänden*, München: Deutsche Taschenbuch Verlag, 2003, Band III, p. 14.
[194] Ibid., p. 24. Translation modified.
[195] Here I refer to Baumgarten's *Ästhetik*. Mirbach, Dagmar, and Alexander G. Baumgarten. Ästhetik. 1., edition, Meiner, F, 2009. and Sulzer's *Allgemeine Theorie der Schönen Künste*, Leipzig: Dyk, 1792.
[196] Lessing, *Laokoon*, "Vorrede."

examples will taste more of the original sources]. Of course, an explicit methodology is never spelled out, yet the passage indicates an empirical inductive method to be at work in Lessing's aesthetics. Most significant here is his insight that the criteria for making aesthetic judgments should take into account formal and material distinctions among the arts. The Horatian dictum "Ut pictura poesis" [as is painting so is poetry], which influenced generations of critics and artists all the way up to Winckelmann, no longer serves as an adequate criterion by which to judge poetry and painting. For Lessing, aesthetic judgments should not conflate artistic mediums; rather, they should build their criteria around these differences, a claim that directly challenges the Horatian paradigm. This much is clear even before he begins his polemic against Winckelmann. An epigram by Plutarch announces the organizing principle of Lessing's treatise, which functions as an alternative to the Horatian tradition: "Ὑλη και τροποις μιμησεως διαφερουσι"[197] [durch den Stoff und die Arten der Nachahmung unterscheiden sie sich / subjects differ in their materials and types of imitation]. While the majority of his peers worked to articulate general aesthetic theories, Lessing shows the inherent value in localizing aesthetic judgments to the specific medium in which a given artwork is situated.[198]

At this point, I will begin to demonstrate how Lessing brings similar insights to bear on the methodological practices of eighteenth-century theology, which showed a propensity to judge revealed knowledge (signs, miracles, prophecies) as if it could be verified through rational

[197] Ibid.

[198] For Lessing, each artistic medium makes use of different strategies to facilitate aesthetic pleasure and our judgments upon various works of art should also take into consideration these formal differences. In section XVI of his *Laokoon*, Lessing defines the crucial difference between painting and poetry. Simultaneity and successivity are the concepts on which the difference between painting and poetry turn. Wheras painting uses signs all at once, poetry uses signs that unfold in a sequence. For an excellent study on this topic through the perspective of semiotics, see Wellbery, David, *Lessing's Laocoon: Semiotics and Aesthetics in the Age of Reason*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984.

procedures. That is to say, to judge revealed truths according to criteria that properly belongs to natural science. In the next section, I will venture a more extensive analysis of the particular theological systems that Lessing targeted during the fragment controversy, but for now it is necessary to at least briefly sketch a general picture of how theology begins to make use of natural science, which ushers in new standards for judging theological arguments and concepts according to how well they harmonize with natural science (i.e. empirical and logical proofs). On the surface, these proofs 1) promise to make it possible for religious subjects believe in the existence of God or doctrines of faith on the strength of argument[199] (rather than feeling, prejudice, or opinion), and 2) assume that scientific knowledge of the natural world can contribute to a better understanding of God. After all (so it was thought), if God were the architect of the world it would seem plausible that his fingerprint lay somewhere upon his creation.[200] Yet upon closer examination, it becomes apparent that these attempts to prove the existence of God and facilitate a greater understanding of Him proceed on the assumption that the divine logos can be justified through human reason and not simply through faith alone. Of course, these proofs undermine Luther's efforts to diminish philosophy's influence on theology and maintain strict borders between them—a task he forcefully makes known in his *Disputations against Scholastic Theology*, which argues: "In vain does one fashion a logic of faith […] No syllogistic form is valid when applied to divine terms […] If a syllogistic form of reasoning holds in divine matters, then [for instance] the doctrine of the Trinity

[199] The three most famous arguments for the existence of God during the period from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries were the ontological (Descartes), the cosmological (Leibniz), and the physicotheological (Clarke) arguments.
[200] Here I am referring to the design/physicotheological argument, popularized by Samuel Clarke's *A Demonstration of the Being and Attributes of God* (1705), but already latent in Melanchthon's 16th oration, *On Natural Philosophy*.

is demonstrable and not an object of faith […] Briefly, the whole Aristotle is to theology as darkness is to light."[201]

One of the more influential proofs is found in Descartes' fifth meditation, which offers an especially illuminating example of how theology might take recourse in natural science to achieve its ends (i.e. conviction). In it he writes:

> But now, if because I can produce from my thought the idea of something entails that everything which I clearly and distinctly perceive to belong to that thing really does belong to it, is not this a possible basis for another argument to prove the existence of God? Certainly, the idea of God, or a supremely perfect being, is one that I find within me just as surely as the idea of any shape or number. And my understanding that it belongs to his nature that he always exists is no less clear and distinct than is the case when I prove of any shape or number that some property belongs to its nature.[202]

Here Descartes entertains the possibility that mathematical certainty could serve as the "possible basis" for proving the existence of God. In other words, just as we determine mathematical certainties by intuiting clear and distinct ideas from arithmetic or geometry (e.g. all angles of a triangle must add up to 180 degrees or certain numbers are always odd, while others are even), so too can we infer the necessity of God's existence by intuiting the (clear and distinct) idea of a perfect being, who was responsible for bringing all existence into being. Simply stated, Descartes' mediation suggests that human thought is able to infer the ontological existence of God, which still enjoyed wide appeal throughout the eighteenth century.

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[201] Luther, Martin, *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, third edition, ed. Timothy F. Lull and William R. Russell, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012, p. 16.
[202] Descartes, René, *Discourse on Method & Meditations on First Philosophy*, fourth edition, trans. Donald Cress, Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1998, Meditation V, "Of the Essence of Material Things, and, Again, of God: That He Exists."

A more radical iteration that attempts to reconcile natural science with theology is developed in Spinoza's *Ethics*, which argues that God is the immanent cause of nature and his attributes spread out infinitely across all of eternity. "By God," Spinoza states, "I understand a being absolutely infinite, that is, a substance consisting of an infinity of attributes, of which each one expresses an eternal and infinite essence."[203] Unlike Descartes, who affirms a traditional concept of God as a transcendent being who is responsible for all of creation, Spinoza understands God as the immanent cause of nature, which forges an identity between nature and God, wherein the infinite diversity of the natural world comes to be seen as an expression of God's essence.

By the time we get to the mid-eighteenth century the alliance between natural science and theology appears to have grown stronger. The theological writings of Wolff, Leibniz, and Baumgarten each advance the legacies of their predecessors in this respect. However, a single example from Baumgarten's *Metaphysics* must suffice to illustrate this point. In his *Metaphysics* it becomes clear that not only does theology need natural science to supply proof of God's existence (Descartes), but that without God the law of (non)contradiction, which is, according to Baumgarten, "absolutely primary" for all sciences, would not be possible.[204] "If God were not actual," Baumgarten writes,

> then the principle of contradiction, which is the first principle of both the form and the matter in all our proofs, would be false. Therefore, even though many sciences could be completely proven without any theological premise, nevertheless, unless

[203] See Spinoza, Benedict, *A Spinoza Reader: The Ethics and other Works*, ed. & trans. Edwin Curley, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994, p. 86.
[204] See Baumgarten, Alexander, *Metaphysics*, trans. & ed. Courtney D. Fugate & John Hymers, New York: Bloomsbury, 2013, § 7: "[that] which is negative, something that cannot be represented, something impossible, something inconsistent, (an absurdity), something involving or implying a contradiction, something contradictory […] *This proposition* is called *the principle of contradiction*, and *it is absolutely primary*."

> God were actual, there would be neither these sciences themselves nor their objects; indeed, on the contrary, they would not be possible.[205]

For better or worse, science shows itself to be completely wedded to the task of proving the existence of God, and the idea of perfection (which was thought to be tied to an understanding of God) provides science with its most essential instrument for demonstrating truth. Baumgarten implies that if there were no God (i.e. if atheism were the law of the land), science might not be possible for it would lose the ability to distinguish between true and false propositions. However, one should not be fooled by Baumgarten's modesty, for he also maintains that "many sciences could be completely proven without any theological premise."[206]

Lessing, by contrast, ascribes value to revealed knowledge precisely because it is beyond the reach of natural science. To my mind, his intervention produces a situation in which religious subjects must actively work to secure their convictions rather than relying on Christian dogma or rational proofs to legitimize a given faith tradition. Both dogma and rational proofs serve as prosthetics of faith and undermine the freedom of religious subjects to willfully bind themselves to the underlying ethos of religion. In a sense, Lessing seems to renew Luther's insistence that a sharp distinction between the offices of theology and philosophy be maintained; however, Lessing's justification for doing so is more persuasive than Luther's often irrational dismissal of philosophical inquiry.[207] Moreover, Lessing's rationale parallels his insights with respect to the

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[205] Ibid., § 285.
[206] Ibid., § 824.
[207] For instance, see Luther's *Disputation Against Scholastic Philosophy*: "Virtually the entire ethics of Aristotle is the worst enemy of Grace. This is said in opposition to the Scholastics" (p. 16). Luther, Martin. *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*. Third Edition. Ed. Timothy F. Lull & William R. Russell. Fortress Press: Mineapolis, 2012.

difference between painting and poetry: to bind oneself to an article of faith requires a different set of considerations than those needed to assent to a proposition made by natural science.

The theological import of Lessing's *Laokoon* rests in large part on his conception of the "pregnante Moment" [pregnant moment]. The pregnant moment is an aesthetic imperative that calls on artists to represent their subjects in such a way that the audience can use their reflective powers to bring the artwork to a state of completion. Lessing describes the rule in the following terms: "dasjenige aber nur allein ist fruchtbar, was der Einbildungskraft freies Spiel läßt. Je mehr wir sehen, desto mehr müssen wir hinzudenken können. Je mehr wir dazu denken, desto mehr müssen wir sehen glauben"[208] [Now that alone is significant and fruitful which gives free play to the imagination. The more we see, the more must we be able to add by thinking. The more we add thereto by thinking, so much the more can we believe ourselves to see]. The passage develops a dialectics of seeing that, for instance, deviates from the optics expressed in Klopstock's fabrication of doubting Thomas, whose desire to see everything violates the proposed rule and earns him condemnation. Here, Lessing seeks to harness the desire to see by showing how degrees of concealment are necessary to incentivize thought to reveal something further about a given object.[209] At this point, there is an unmistakable idealism at work in Lessing's aesthetics: "Ohnstreitig; denn was wir in einem Kunstwerke schön finden, das findet nicht unser Auge, sondern unsere Einbildungskraft, durch das Auge, schön"[210] [Unquestionably; for what we find beautiful in a work of art is not found beautiful by the eye, but by our imagination through the

[208] Lessing, *Laokoon*, section III, p. 26–27.
[209] Nikolas von Kues' *De doctra ignorantia [On Learned Ignorance]* (1440) could be characterized as a prefiguration of Lessing's argument. See especially chapter 3, "Absolute Truth is Beyond our Grasp."
[210] Lessing, *Laokoon*, section VI, p. 53.

eye]. This assumes that the viewer does not simply grasp the beauty of an artwork by applying concepts and categories to what it sees, but that the viewer has access to the interiority of the artwork by means of the imagination, which then grasps the beautiful.[211] However, this assumption breaks down if the viewer sees too much from the outside, Lessing writes, that this "heißt der Phantasie die Flügel binden, und sie nötigen"[212] [would bind the wings of imagination and coerce it]. Such a view articulates a participatory regime of aesthetics that is also at the heart of Lessing's theology of spirit, which I argue involves a similar dynamic between the outward "letter" and the inner "spirit" of religion. I will discuss Lessing's theology of spirit in the final section of this chapter, but the idea that more work needs to be done in order to complete our understanding of religion effectively opens up the biblical canon to external critique and allows theological concepts to evolve rather than be held captive by dogma. Lessing's theory that a "New Eternal Gospel" lies concealed in the "Elementarbüchern des Neuen Bundes" [primers of the New Covenant] represents the culmination of this idea.[213]

Now that my argument is on the table, I want to provide further justification for making these claims. I first suspected that Lessing's aesthetics were operative in his theology after reflecting on a comment made by his theological adversary, Johann Melchior Goeze (1717–1786), who accused Lessing of obscuring religious truths through a style that makes use of metaphors,

[211] See Joachim Jacob's "Analysis of Beauty: Zur Aufklärung des Schönen zwischen theologischer und materialer Ästhetik," in *Literatur und Theologie im 18. Jahrhundert: Konfrontationen, Kontroversen und Konkurrenzen*, Hallesche Beiträge zur Europäischen Aufklärung, 41, hrsg. von Friedrich, Hans-Edwin; Haefs, Wilhelm; Soboth, Christian, Berlin: De Gruyter, 2011.
[212] Lessing, *Laokoon*, section III, p. 27.
[213] See Lessing's *Erziehung des Menschengeschlechts*, § 85f. The New Eternal Gospel designates a future time when the promise of eternal salvation in a transcendent world no longer incentivizes humanity to act virtuously; rather, every act of virtue in this world is accompanied by a concrete experience of salvation.

allegories, and similes—through what Goeze ultimately calls "Theaterlogik" [a logic of the theater]:

> Die Art wie Herr Lessing streitet ist sonderbar. Seine Bemühungen gehen nicht dahin, den Verstand seiner Leser durch Gründe zu überzeugen, sondern sich ihrer Phantasie durch allerhand unerwartete Bilder und Anspielungen zu bemächtigen. Er bestimmt daher nichts durch richtige Erklärungen, er führet nie einen gründlichen und einleuchtenden Beweis, sondern er spielt beständig mit Gleichnissen, Instanzen und Antithesen. Er nimmt die Worte in Verschiedenen Bedeutungen und gerade jedesmal in der jenigen, von welcher er sich die meisten Hoffnung macht, daß sie am ersten blöde Augen blenden werde. Er erlaubt sich Sophismen, Equivocen und Fallacien […][214]
>
> [Lessing's manner of argumentation is very peculiar. He is not concerned with attempting to convince his readers through the use of reason, but instead attempts to take possession of his readers' imagination through all kinds of unexpected images and allusions. He thus determines nothing by means of real explanations, never leads his readers through well-reasoned and plausible proofs, but instead constantly plays with similes, instances, and antitheses. He employs words with many semantic registers and always such that he has the greatest hope of blinding the eyes of his dumbest readers. He permits himself sophisms, equivocations, and fallacies.]

While the comment was likely intended to expose Lessing as a charlatan peddling a secular theology apparently too dangerous for public consumption, Goeze nevertheless struck a nerve. In fact, Lessing is at his most polemical when attempting to defuse this particular charge leveled against his style. Several entries in his *Axiomata* (an especially hostile treatise directed against Goeze in 1778 after he accused Lessing of being an enemy of Christianity) are explicitly devoted to defusing this issue. In one entry, Lessing defends himself by claiming, "Ich bin Liebhaber der Theologie und nicht Theolog. Ich habe auf kein gewisses System schwören müssen. Mich

[214] Goeze, Melchior Johann, *Goezes Streitschriften gegen Lessing*, hrsg. von Erich Schmidt, in Deutsche Litteraturdenkmale des 18. Und 19. Jahrhunderts, Kraus Reprint, Liechtenstein: Nendeln,1968, p. 5. Translation mine.

verbindet nichts, eine andere Sprache, als die meinige, zu reden."[215] [I am an amateur of theology, not a theologian. I have not had to take an oath on any particular system. I am not obliged to speak any language other than my own]. Even if Lessing's modesty seems disingenuous, it nevertheless becomes apparent that Goeze landed a punch in this exchange, yet for reasons that he never fully understood or troubled himself to investigate further.

However, to be guilty of using a literary style to advance theological arguments is not yet to properly speak of aesthetics. After all, figurative language has been an instrument of philosophical and theological discourse ever since Plato and Augustine. Goeze, by contrast, maintains a rigid sense of how theological inquiry should be stylized, and, to him, Lessing symbolizes a negative example:

> *Die Theaterlogik*, und die Logik, welche in theologischen Streitigkeiten insonderheit in denen, welche die Wahrheit der christlichen Religion entschieden sollen, gebraucht werden muss, sind himmelweit unterschieden. Die erste kann auf die Zuschauer große Wirkung thun, und diejenige, welche Goethe in seiner schändlichen *Stella* gebraucht hat, um die Hurerei und Vielweiberei zu rechtfertigen, hat öfters den Zuschauer ein lautes Jauchzen und ein heftiges Klatschen abgelocket. Allein alle Rechtschaffene verabscheuen solche auf dem theologischen Kampfplatze, so wie sie in juristischen Streitigkeiten die Schikane verabscheuen. In der Theaterlogik ist Herr Lessing ein großer Meister.[216]
>
> [*Theater logic* and the kind of logic which must be used in theological disputations, particularly those which aim to decide the truth of the Christian religion, are worlds apart. The former can have a great effect upon the audience, and that which Goethe used in his scandalous play *Stella*, in order to justify whoring and polygamy, often coaxed great cheers and vigorous applause from the audience. Only decent people are averse to such [logic] in the theological arena just as they despise chicanery in legal proceedings. Lessing is a great master in the logic of the theater.]

[215] Lessing, *Werke in drei Bänden*, München: Deutsche Taschenbuch Verlag, 2003, Band III, p. 447. Translation mine.
[216] Goeze, Melchior Johann, *Goezes Streitschriften gegen Lessing*, hrsg. von Erich Schmidt, in Deutsche Litteraturdenkmale des 18. Und 19. Jahrhunderts, Kraus Reprint, Liechtenstein: Nendeln, 1968, p. 7–8. Translation mine.

Being the son of a Lutheran minister, Lessing was well versed in the art of preaching and much of his religious writings perform the function of a sermon directed (ironically) at modern theologians who, like Goeze, continue to falsely assume that their system of faith must appeal to universal truth. In Goeze's eyes, the artistic universe of Lessing and Goethe is in no position to reveal the truths of Christianity; rather, it provides a disservice to society by undermining its moral integrity. Goeze's preference for a style that is unencumbered by rhetorical eloquence is, of course, symptomatic of a wider ideology that permeated the scientific community since the sixteenth century. In their excellent study *The Ends of Rhetoric*, John Bender and David Wellbery identify attitudes like those expressed by Goeze as "emblematic of the Enlightenment as a whole. They bespeak a general movement toward representational neutrality and […] a model of critical communication that stresses the neutrality and transparency of discourse and that, in consequence, throws off the rhetorical tradition."[217] Lessing, for his part, swims against the current of this "general movement" insofar as he views rhetoric and eloquence not merely as ornaments of truth, but as constitutive of truth.[218] Evidence of this can be found in Lessing's *Anti-Goeze* (1778), in which he defends his style more forcefully:

> Ich suche allerdings, durch die Phantasie mit, auf den Verstand meiner Leser zu wirken. Ich halte es nicht allein für nützlich, sondern auch für notwendig, Gründe in Bilder zu kleiden; und alle die Nebenbegriffe, welche die einen oder die andern erwecken, durch Anspielungen zu bezeichnen.[219]
>
> [Above all, I try to act on the understanding of my readers with the help of imagination. I consider it to be not only useful, but also necessary to dress concepts

[217] Bender, John B., and David E. Wellbery, eds., *The Ends of Rhetoric: History, Theory, Practice*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990, p. 13.
[218] See chapter 4 in Blumenberg, Hans, *Paradigmen zu einer Metaphorologie*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1998.
[219] Lessing, *Anti-Goeze*, in *Werke in drei Bänden*, München: Deutsche Taschenbuch Verlag, 2003, Band III, p. 523. Translation mine.

[Gründe] in images; and to describe by means of allusions all the secondary concepts inspired by the concepts or the images.]

Again, the imagination can be used as a means for stimulating further contemplation and allowing one access to a richer conceptual matrix that advances reflection, knowledge, and, in this context, faith. There is no mere "playing with words," Lessing objects, "wo ich mit Worten am meisten spiele, ich dennoch nicht mit leeren Worten spiele; Daß überall ein guter triftiger Sinn zum Grunde liegt[220]" [where I play with words most, I play not with empty words; at bottom there is everywhere a good and valid sense to be found]. Lessing concludes that Goeze's entire approach to their polemic is immature insofar as he refuses to engage with the content of Lessing's ideas, but instead keeps his criticism on the superficial level of style.

Style aside, it was at this juncture that I decided to go back to Lessing's *Laokoon*, published nearly a decade before the fragment controversy, to look for evidence that might link his theological writings more explicitly to an aesthetic paradigm, and found a structural analogy between the "pregnant moment" and the kind of theological approach Lessing attempts to articulate throughout the fragment controversy. As I mentioned, in his *Laokoon*, it is crucial that a viewer's imagination enjoys sufficient freedom to participate in the completion of the artwork. As Lessing puts it, "Wenn Laokoon also seufzet, so kann ihn die Einbildungskraft schreien hören; wenn er aber schreiet, so kann sie von dieser Vorstellung weder eine Stufe höher, noch eine Stufe tiefer steigen, ohne ihn in einem leidlichern, folglich uninteressantern Zustande zu erblicken."[221] [When Laocoon sighs, the imagination may hear him shriek; but when he shrieks, the imagination can neither advance beyond this extreme point, nor descend below it without viewing him under

[220] Ibid., p. 526. Translation mine.
[221] Lessing, *Werke in drei Bänden*, München: Deutsche Taschenbuch Verlag, 2003, Band III, p. 27.

circumstances of less urgent distress, and consequently of diminished interest]. In Lessing's theological writings, a similar situation emerges in a religious subject whose interest stands to be elevated through the uncertain status of revealed knowledge,[222] a condition that activates rather than diminishes the movement of faith.

Lessing's motto throughout the fragment controversy can be summed up in the following comment: "Womit sich die geoffenbarte Religion am meisten weiß, macht mir sie gerade am verdächtigsten"[223] [Where revealed religion is most certain of knowledge, this is precisely where it makes me most suspicious]. His suspicion has to do with two things. First, it relates to the somewhat obvious fact that world religions are grounded on contingent truths of history rather than necessary truths of reason. Even if the historical element of scripture provides the senses with something "factual" to hold on to, this "empirical" record (i.e. eye-witness testimony) still limits the truth of those narratives to the particularities of its history. Second, and perhaps more important for the purpose of this chapter, Lessing's suspicion relates to the assumption that certain truths impede our capacity to participate in the production of meaning. This becomes most audible in Lessing's response to Johann Ress (1732–1803), an orthodox theologian also living in Wolfenbüttel at the time, who argued that Christ's resurrection must be true because he could find no evidence across the four gospel narratives to suggest otherwise.[224] Ress, like many orthodox theologians, was trained to view contradictions in scripture as merely apparent contradictions

[222] I characterize revealed knowledge as uncertain because it rests on historical testimony. Obviously not all of the bible (i.e. not all religious truths are communicated through the medium of history), but when dealing with the New Testament, which is what is at stake in the fragment controversy, these truths do rest on history, a fact which denies religious truth any claim to universality.
[223] Quoted from Taubes, Jacob, *Abendländische Eschatologie*, hrsg. von Rene König, Bern: Franke Verlag, 1947, p. 131.
[224] See Ress' essay: *Die Auferstehungsgeschichte Jesu Christi gegen einige im vierten Beitrage zur Geschichte und Literatur* (1777).

[anscheinend Widersprüche], which could be resolved through historical-critical-exegesis, often making use of the law of non-contradiction to harmonize the *sensus spiritus* and *sensus literalis* of scripture. Ress, therefore, did not find the inflammatory content of the fragments to pose any serious threat to Christianity. His belief in the inerrancy of scripture angered Lessing, who was determined not to allow willful blindness or religious prejudice to get the upper hand in a public debate he knew would provide theology with the tools it needed to disarm certain forms of religious skepticism. Against Ress, Lessing states:

> Nicht die Wahrheit, in deren Besitz irgend ein Mensch ist, oder zu sein vermeinet, sondern die aufrichtige Mühe, die er angewandt hat, hinter die Wahrheit zu kommen, macht den Wert des Menschen. Denn nicht durch den Besitz, sondern durch die Nachforschung der Wahrheit erweitern sich seine Kräfte, worin allein seine immer wachsende Vollkommenheit bestehet. Der Besitz macht ruhig, träge, stolz.[225]
>
> [Not the truth which someone possesses or believes he possesses, but the honest effort he has made to get at the truth, constitutes a human being's worth. For it is not through the possession of truth, but through its pursuit, that his powers are enlarged, and it is in this alone that his ever-growing perfection lies. Possession makes us inactive, lazy, and proud.]

By turning a blind eye to the content of the fragments, Ress clearly failed in his effort to "honestly get at the truth," but instead withdrew himself into familiar prejudices. Moreover, this passage shows the spirit of the pregnant moment to be serviceable to Lessing's theology. Again, we find here a labor-based conception of knowledge that is driven by a progressive humanism, and this structure applies equally to Lessing's aesthetics and theology. Any theology that attempts to secure its doctrines of faith through dogma or rational proof leaves behind a dead letter that vitiates any aspiration for advancement. In other words, a dead letter leaves no room for the program of

[225] Lessing, *Werke und Briefe*, Band 8, hrsg. von Arno Schilson, Frankfurt am Main: Deutsche Klassiker Verlag, p. 510.

Bildung that stands at the heart of both Lessing's aesthetics and his theology. Already at the early stages of the fragment controversy, Lessing articulates a theological Denkungsart that promises to enliven religious experience rather than limit it; one that implies religion need not be explained scientifically or dogmatically but that it can assume a lead role in the project of Bildung and stand alongside science and politics. Moreover, one of the inevitable outcomes of this structural analogy, which the Romantics take full advantage of in their creative works, is that it becomes increasingly difficult to distinguish between religious experience and aesthetic experience, even though the ends of art (i.e. pleasure) and the ends of religion (i.e. conviction) remain discrete. This reading challenges recent theories about the secularization of religion (Schmitt, Taubes, Löwith) through aesthetics by suggesting that aesthetic experience does not replace religious experience, but rather that the two join forces and expand the possibilities in which religious subjects can relate to the biblical tradition.

In order to justify his theology, Lessing needs to turn the Lutheran hierarchy between the letter and spirit on its head, which situates him within the humanist tradition advocated by Erasmus.[226] Yet, before exploring the intricacies of Lessing's theology of spirit, it will be necessary to get a better sense of the particular theological systems that became objects of criticism during the fragment controversy.

[226] See Erasmus, Desiderius, *Discourse on Free Will: Erasmus–Luther*, ed. Ernst F. Winter et al., London: Continuum, 1996.

III. Lessing's Unholy Trinity: Deism, Neology, and Orthodoxy in the Context of the *Fragmentenstreit*

The fragment controversy began shortly after Lessing published *Von Duldung der Deisten: Fragmenten des Ungenannten* (1774–77), which were followed up by his own critical commentary under the heading *Gegensätze des Herausgebers*. The fragments—numbering seven in total[227]—were excerpts taken from the manuscripts of Samuel Hermann Reimarus (1694–1768), a family friend of Lessing who harbored private sympathies for English deism. The content of the fragments was so inflammatory that in 1770 Lessing travelled to Berlin to consult his friends Friedrich Nicolai (1733–1811), Moses Mendelssohn (1729–1786), and Reimarus' daughter Elise Reimarus[228] (1735–1805), about whether or not he should publish them. All three predicted that going to press would only lead to trouble and advised Lessing not to do so. Not heeding the counsel of his closest friends, Lessing eventually went through with the publication, promising Elise and her family that he would keep the author's name anonymous so that they would not be exposed to any public ridicule or possibly even state retribution.[229]

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[227] The seven fragments were published in the following sequence: first, the 1774 publication of "Von der Duldung der Deisten." Five more fragments followed later in 1777: "Von Verschreiung der Vernunft auf den Kanzeln," "Unmöglichkeit einer Offenbarung, die alle Menschen auf eine gegründete Art glauben könnten," "Durchgang der Israeliten durchs rote Meer," "Daß die Bücher der Alten Testament nicht geschrieben worden, eine Religion zu offenbaren," and "Über die Auferstehungsgeschichte." Lastly, in 1778 another fragment titled: "Von dem Zwecke Jesu und seiner Jünger." A complete version of the nearly 1,500-page manuscript would not be published until 1972, under the title *Apologie oder Schutzschrift für die vernünftigen Verehrer Gottes* (Frankfurt am Main: Insel Verlag).

[228] For Eilise Reimarus' role in the fragment controversy, see Spalding, Almut Marianne Grützner, *Elise Reimarus (1735–1805): The Muse of Hamburg: A Woman of the German Enlightenment*, Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2005.

[229] For scholarship on the punitive measures that the Prussian state took against apostate publications and "free" translations of the bible, see Sheehan, Jonathan, *The Enlightenment Bible: Translation, Scholarship, Culture*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005, especially chapter 5.

Before turning to the content of the fragments and Lessing's criticism of it, I want to provide a brief chronology of the events and summarize relevant background information pertaining to the three theological systems that Lessing found himself at odds with throughout the controversy.

The first response to the fragments came from Johann Daniel Schumann (1714–1787), a teacher of Lutheran theology in Hannover. Schumann attempted to challenge the claims of the anonymous author in his essay *Über die Evidenz der Beweise für die Wahrheit der Christlichen Religion* (1777). However, Schumann failed to address the specific objections raised by the fragments, but instead fell back on familiar prejudices that viewed the historical accounts of the Evangelists as evidence of fulfilled prophecies and miracles. Lessing responded to Schumann with his famous short essay *Über den Beweis des Geistes und der Kraft* (1777), which challenges the adequacy of historical evidence (i.e. reports of miracles) to serve as a legitimate foundation for Christian faith. Lessing supplements this essay with a brief dialogue between "He" and "I," titled *Das Testament Johannis* (1777). In this imagined dialogue Lessing dramatizes a confrontation between a dogmatist ["Er"], who insists that true Christian love [die wahre christliche Liebe] be based on doctrines [die christliche Glaubenslehre], and an interlocutor ["Ich"], who argues, conversely, that true Christian love can be realized outside Church doctrine.[230] Schumann ventures another response with his *Antwort auf das aus Braunschweig an ihn gerichtete Schreiben über den Beweis des Geistes und der Kraft* (1777), but Lessing's attention had already shifted to Johann Heinrich Ress (1732–1803).

[230] The dialogue also contrasts the Gospel of John and its highly influential first line—"In the beginning was the word"—with the apocryphal Testament of St. John, which is reducible to the precept "little children, love one another." See section I of this chapter.

Ress, also an orthodox Lutheran theologian, responded to the fragments with his essay: *Die Auferstehungsgeschichte Jesu Christi gegen einige im vierten Beitrage zur Geschichte und Literatur* (1777). In the essay, Ress refused to acknowledge that discrepancies in the four Gospel narratives pose any serious threat to Christianity, arguing instead that they only signify apparent discrepancies [anscheinend Widersprüche]. Failing to take the objections of the fragments seriously moved Lessing to polemics. In response to Ress, Lessing published *Eine Duplik* (1778), an essay challenging the commonly held belief within orthodox thinking that considers scripture infallible on account of its authors being divinely inspired.

The participation of Johann Melchior Goeze (1717–1786), Lessing's former neighbor and head of St. Catherine's Church in Hamburg, further intensified these debates. This increased hostility was primarily owing to Goeze's accusation that Lessing advocated the unnamed author's religious criticism. "Durch seine mittelbaren Angriffe auf unser Religion," Goeze argues, "und auf die heilige Schrift, verstehe ich den von ihm veranstalteten Druck der Fragmente, und die von ihm übernommene Advocatur des Verfassers derselben"[231] [From his indirect attacks on our religion and on holy scripture, I view his printing and organizing of these fragments to be equivalent to his advocating their author]. Simply printing the fragments was enough to provoke the enmity of Goeze, who had earned himself a reputation for being a militant orthodox Lutheran, known amusingly in some circles as "Melchior Cromwell," the "Grand Inquisitor of Hamburg," and the "night watchman of the Zion of Hamburg."[232] Goeze published two essays during the course of

[231] See Goeze, Melchior Johann. "Etwas Vorläufiges…" in *Goezes Streitschriften gegen Lessing*, hrsg. von Erich Schmidt, in Deutsche Litteraturdenkmale des 18. Und 19. Jahrhunderts, Kraus Reprint, Liechtenstein: Nendeln, 1968, p. 4–5f. Translation mine.
[232] See Nisbet, Hugh, *Gotthold Ephraim Lessing: His Life, Works, and Thought*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013, and Moore, Evelyn K., *The Passions of Rhetoric: Lessing's Theory of Argument and the German Enlightenment*, Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1993.

the controversy. The first bore the unwieldy title *Etwas Vorläufiges gegen des Herrn Hofraths Lessings mittelbare und unmittelbare feindselige Angriffe auf unser allerheiligste Religion, und auf den einigen Lehrgrund derselben, die heilige Schrift* (1778), and the second was modestly titled *Lessings Schwächen* (1778). Lessing, in turn, responded with several publications all dating from 1778: *Eine Parabel*, *Axiomata*, *Anti-Goeze*, and *Der Nötigen Antwort auf eine sehr unnötige Frage des Herrn Hauptpastor Goeze in Hamburg*. Realizing that Lessing was gaining the upper hand in their public debates, Goeze made an appeal to the Duke of Braunschweig to have Lessing's publishing immunity revoked on grounds that his writings undermined the authority of the Church, forcing Lessing to continue the conversation indirectly through his play *Nathan der Weise* (1779). While many additional public figures enter the debates that were ignited by the fragments, I stop here to move into the second and more substantial aim of this section, which is to bring out those aspects of deism, neology and orthodox Lutheranism that become objects of criticism for Lessing. Since it was deism that initially provoked Lessing, I will begin with an exposition of it and consider one of Reimarus' fragments as an example.

a. Deism

Deism emerged concurrently with the scientific revolutions of the seventeenth century and was, at the time, considered more radical than other forms of rational theology.[233] This was partly owing to the fact that deism did not attempt to limit the task of theological inquiry to affirming traditional Christian doctrines and beliefs, but instead made use of rational methods to establish a more true "religion of nature" that could unapologetically reject both incoherent Church dogma

[233] Gay, Peter, *Deism: An Anthology*, Michigan: Van Nostrand Press, 1968.

and dubious historical facts.[234] Indeed, many deists made historical inquiry—often into Church history—the primary weapon against orthodox sects of Christianity by calling into question the credibility of testimonies and the reliability of source materials. Deism, thus, considers any theological argument that justifies Christianity on the basis of miracles or fulfilled prophecies as fraudulent superstition, mere enthusiasm, and, above all, an affront to the sufficiency of reason.[235] Samuel Johnson (1709–1784), famous for his criticism of English literature, described deism as the affirmation of God's existence "without the reception of any revealed religion."[236] Instead of accepting the authority of revealed truth on faith, deists prefer to observe the workings of well-ordered nature to gain knowledge of God's existence. This knowledge is based on the inference that the intricacies of nature— our *experience* of its beauty, order, and purposiveness—indicates an intelligence *analogous* to that of human intelligence, only on a scale that would require divine authorship. David Hume, who realized that such analogies were extremely speculative, challenged the design argument in his *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (1779) by proposing that our experiences of nature's imperfections can just as convincingly tell the story of an apprentice God who "botched and bungled many worlds" before the present one was forged. Hume constructed alternative analogies that exposed the absurdity of the design argument. "If we survey a ship," Hume wrote, "what an exalted idea must we form of the ingenuity of the carpenter, who framed so complicated, useful, and beautiful a machine? And what surprise must we feel, when we find him a stupid mechanic, who imitated others, and copied an art, which, through a long succession

[234] See Lucci, Diego, *Scripture and Deism: The Biblical Criticism of the Eighteenth-Century British Deists*, Bern: Peter Lang, 2008.
[235] Allison, Henry, *Lessing and the Enlightenment*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1966.
[236] See Johnson, *Deism*, in *A Dictionary of the English Language*, vol. I.

of ages, after multiplied trials, mistakes, corrections, deliberations, and controversies, had been gradually improving?"[237] Of course, Hume's *Dialogues* was not the only critique of deism in circulation. Two years after its posthumous publication Kant would also refute the design argument in his *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (1781). Kant denied that any single experience of nature, regardless of all its apparent perfections, could ever serve as an adequate proof of God's existence.[238] Leaving the criticism aside, however, deism poised itself towards a form of skepticism that no longer trusted revealed knowledge, but instead confided in the authority of reason to both prove the existence of God and to determine which articles of faith are worthy of assent.

Reimarus' fragments epitomize this skepticism by constantly putting pressure on Christian doctrines that fail to meet basic demands of reason. In the interest of concision, I will limit my analysis to the fragment titled "Über die Auferstehungsgeschichte" (1777). This fragment provides a general sense of deism's skeptical approach to Christian doctrine, and it is the fragment that we should bear in mind when analyzing Lessing's interventions against using to historical evidence to

[237] Hume, David, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion and Other Writings*, ed. Dorothy Coleman, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007. Part IV, 5, p. 43.

[238] See Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, A621/B649: "Die transzendentale Idee von einem notwendigen allgenugsamen Urwesen ist so überschwenglich groß, so hoch über alles Empirische, das jederzeit bedingt ist, erhaben, daß man teils niemals Stoff genug in der Erfahrung auftreiben kann, um einen solchen Begriff zu füllen, teils immer unter dem Bedingten herumtappt, und stets vergeblich nach dem Unbedingten, wovon uns kein Gesetz irgendeiner empirischen Synthesis ein Beispiel oder dazu die mindeste Leitung gibt, suchen werden" [The transcendental idea of a necessary all-sufficient original being is so overwhelmingly great, so sublimely high above everything empirical, which is at all times conditioned, that partly one can never even procure enough material in experience to fill such a concept, and partly if one searches for the unconditioned among conditioned things, then one will seek forever and always in vain, since no law of any empirical synthesis will ever give an example of such a thing, or even the least guidance in looking for it]. English translation from Kant, Immanuel. *The Critique of Pure Reason*. Edited by Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood, Cambridge University Press, 1998. p. 578.

ground faith. In the fragment, Reimarus casts doubt on the facticity of Christ's resurrection because witness testimonies appear to be in an obvious state of disagreement. If, according to Reimarus, the four gospel narratives represent conflicting reports of the same event, then Christians have sufficient grounds to doubt the doctrine of eternal salvation, which is inextricably tied to those reports:

> Zeugen, die bei ihrer Aussage in den wichtigsten Umständen so sehr variieren, würden in keinen weltlichen Händeln, wenn es auch nur bloß auf ein wenig Geld einer Person ankäme, als gültig und rechtsbeständig erkannt werden, so daß der Richter sich auf ihre Erzählung sicher gründen, und den Spruch darauf bauen könnte: Wie kann man den begehren, daß, auf die Aussage von solchen vier variierenden Zeugen, die ganze Welt, das ganze menschliche Geschlecht zu allen Zeiten, und aller Orten, ihre Religion, Glauben und Hoffnung zur Seligkeit gründen soll?[239]
>
> [Witnesses whose testimonies disagree so much on the most important details would not be accepted by a judge in any worldly affair, even if it were only a question of deciding who has the right to a small amount of money. How then can one demand that the testimonies of four such conflicting witnesses should serve as the basis upon which the whole world, the entire human race in all times and places, grounds its religious faith and hope of salvation?]

The analogy is telling, for it suggests that a proper judge—in both worldly affairs [weltlichen Händeln] and in matters of religious faith [Glauben und Hoffnung zur Seligkeit]—makes decisions according to categories of "agreement" and "disagreement" [i.e. that which is not "variierende"]. The principle of non-contradiction, thus, guides Reimarus' historical-critical inquiry into Christ's resurrection. He makes no effort to distinguish between witness testimony and historical reports of that testimony, assumes the "wichtigsten Umstände" [the most important

[239] Lessing, *Werke und Briefe*, Band 8, hrsg. von Arno Schilson, Frankfurt am Main: Deutsche Klassiker Verlag, p. 294. English translation from Allison, Henry, *Lessing and the Enlightenment*, Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1966. p. 44.

circumstances] to be objective and fixed, and fails to acknowledge that particular opinions, beliefs, and prejudices inevitably mediate witness testimony and historical narration.[240] By modeling his inquiry of Christ's resurrection after methods befitting natural science, Reimarus finds little justification for belief in the doctrine of eternal salvation. Unsurprisingly, this attempt to establish "certain" proof [i.e. testimony free of contradiction] among the available historical evidence leads Reimarus into even darker skepticism. He speculates, for instance, that the salvific narrative of Christ's death emerged only in the years following his crucifixion, and that Christ's teachings about salvation refer only to his hope of actualizing concrete political goals for the Jewish people. Reimarus' investigation brings him to the radical conclusion that the apostles most likely stole Christ's body from his grave and fabricated lies about the universal significance of his death to stabilize their own power within the early days of the Church.[241] From this one fragment it becomes obvious that Reimarus seeks to replace revealed knowledge with certain knowledge, and that he grants the Buchstabe [testimony and historical reports] a lead role in achieving that end.

[240] In this sense, Lessing follows Spinoza (Theologico-Political Treatise, chapter 6) and makes this a point of contention in section V of his *Gegensätze*: "Sind widersprüche unter den Zeugen vorhanden *gewesen*?—Anscheinende: warum nicht? Denn die Erfahrung gibt es, und kann schlechterdings nicht anders sein, als daß von mehrern Zeugen nicht jeder die nämliche Sache, und dem nämlichen Orte, zu der nämlichen Zeit, anders sehen, anders hören, folglich anders erzählen sollte" [Were true contradictions present among the witnesses—that is, contradictions which no fair comparison or more detailed explanation can remove?—How are we to know? We do not even know whether the witnesses were ever properly examined. At least there is no longer any record of such an examination, and anyone who says that there were such contradictions has in this respect as much justification as someone who denies it].

[241] To this effect, Reimarus writes: "It was only after the death of Jesus that the apostles hit upon the idea of a spiritual, suffering savior of the whole human race. Hence, after Jesus' death the apostles discarded their previous conception of his teachings and deeds, and therefore first ceased to conceive of him as a powerful, earthly savior of the people of Israel." In "Von dem Zwecke Jesu und seiner Jünger," quoted from Allison, Henry, *Lessing and the Enlightenment*, Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1966.

b. Neology

In sharp contrast to deism, neology (circa 1740–80) never turned its back on a traditional conception of revelation (i.e. a divinely communicated knowledge whose assent requires faith as opposed to reason).[242] Instead, it followed in the footsteps of Leibniz and Wolff, who celebrated a perceived harmony between revelation and reason.[243] Eager to apply this insight more broadly within the field of theology, neologians worked diligently, often in an apologetic mode,[244] to reconcile Christianity with a skeptical modernity. In order to actualize this, neology—like deism—had to provide a more rational justification for faith, which meant that it too challenged the authority of church dogma and subjected Christian doctrine to targeted critiques.[245] Yet unlike deism, revelation played an essential part in this process. For instance, August Friedrich Wilhelm Sack (1703–1786), a neologian who gained literary praise for his *Vertheidiger Glaube der Christen* (1750), considered revelation to be the "Fernrohr der Vernunft" [telescope of reason], helping to guide reason as it strives to bring "Das Wesentliche des Glaubens in ein desto helleres Licht"[246]

[242] The conflict between deism and neology can in many ways be read as a continuation of the conflict between Bayle's skepticism (especially the "Second Clarification" of his *Historical and Critical Dictionary*) and Leibniz' optimism (*Theodicy*). See also Odo Marquard's *Skepsis in der Moderne philosophische Studien*, Stuttgart: Reclam, 2007 for a more recent reflection on this topic.
[243] See Leibniz *Theodicy*, Book I, § 39: "But since reason is a gift of God, even as faith is, contention between them would cause God to contend against God; and if the objections of reason against any article of faith are insoluble, then it must be said that this alleged article will be false and not revealed." See also Wolff, *Vernünfftige Gedancken von Gott, der Welt und der Seele des Menschen*, § 1014: "Da der göttliche Verstand die Quelle aller Wahrheiten ist, derselbe aber wegen seiner Vollkommenheit nichts wiedersprechendes hervorbringen kan; so kan auch dasjenige, was Gott soll geoffenbahret haben, Wahrheiten der Vernunfft nicht zu wieder sein" [Since the divine mind is the source of all truth, and since nothing can contradict His perfection, then reason cannot contradict what God has revealed].
[244] A survey of the publication titles among the neologians provides overwhelming evidence that this was the case. See also Aner, Karl, *Die Theologie der Lessingzeit*, Hildesheim: G. Olms, 1964, p. 27f., and Kaiser, Gerhard, *Klopstock: Religion und Dichtung*, Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1963, p. 42.
[245] On neology's most-wanted list were the doctrines of original sin, predestination, eternal punishment, atonement, supernatural beings (particularly the devil), miracles, and the status of symbolic books.
[246] Quoted from Aner, *Theologie der Lessingzeit*, p. 63. Translation mine.

[the essence of belief into an ever brighter light]. Similarly, Johann Friedrich Wilhelm Jerusalem[247] takes revelation for the "zuverlässigste Vernunftlehre"[248] [most reliable doctrine of reason] and commits himself to articulating a "new" theology—"Neologie"—that promises to reconcile the differences between revealed religion and natural religion. Jerusalem follows natural religion in attempting to increase the apparent legitimacy of revealed truths—i.e. to check that no divinely revealed truths were contradictory, no general laws of nature were broken, and that the content of revelation was not averse to human reason and morality. By achieving a greater degree of coherency on this basic level, Jerusalem (and other neologians) hoped that religious subjects would be more compelled to confess their faith on rational grounds. In this way, neology no longer treated religion as a closed system, but like Lessing and other enlightenment theologians, tested them according to how well they promoted piety and virtue. However, Jerusalem still needed to accord revelation an equal share in this process. To that end, he used Locke's biblical paraphrasing as a model,[249] and created popular narratives that described the gradual development of reason from prelapsarian times to the time of Christ.[250] According to Jerusalem, there was an "Uroffenbarung" [original revelation], concurrent with the fall, that showed reason to be a better guide for humanity than mere "Sinnlichkeit," and that the entire history of Christianity tells the story of how revelation assists humanity in actualizing greater rational capacities—which were thought to translate into

[247] My reading of Jerusalem is indebted to Karl Aner's monumental work *Die Theologie der Lessingzeit*, Hildesheim: G. Olms, 1964 (originally published 1929), which impressively continues to serve as the authoritative work on neology.
[248] Jerusalem, *Betrachtungen*, I, p. 412. Translation mine.
[249] Jerusalem was exposed to Locke's *Paraphrases on the Epistles of St. Paul* (1707) during his studies in England from 1738–40. The paraphrastic tradition became a popular alternative to translation insofar as it retold familiar stories in a popular idiom, often in accordance with prevailing sensibilities and customs.
[250] See Jerusalem, *Betrachtungen*, I.

greater ethical capacities. For instance, Jerusalem describes the revelation of Mosaic Law as a "Morgenröte" [twilight] in comparison to the "größere Licht" [greater light] emanating from Christ's teachings. These kinds of statements—which can easily be construed as anti-Semitic—belong to what Jonathan Sheehan referred to in his book as a "mania for pedagogy" that swept across Europe starting around the 1760s.[251] Lessing too participates in this mania and understands the differences between Mosaic Law and the teachings of Christ—or the Old Testament and the New Testament—to be a difference of human development. That is to say, an individual (a child, properly speaking) initially requires more stringent rules before learning to cope with greater autonomy.

While Jerusalem's pedagogical account of revelation might appear similar to that of Lessing's *Erziehung*, he does not grant reason the capacity to develop independent of revelation (see Lessing's *Erziehung*, section 4). This difference is significant. For Jerusalem, revelation becomes a means to excuse non-rational or morally dubious content within Christian doctrine. That is to say, such content only appears in a depraved state because more advanced knowledge of our rational capacities had not yet been revealed. A second (and more common) strategy was to attribute ambiguous content or doctrinal contradictions to apocryphal additions made by unknown authors or translators during the Early Church. Pursuing this course of action involved studying the history of the Church itself and exploring its literary estates to ascertain the authenticity of the texts in question. Consequently, the tactics of neology have a tendency to subsume the content of scripture under popular morality. When confronted by "offensive" testimony within biblical narratives, for instance, neology must perform an operation designed to restore dignity to scripture.

[251] See Sheehan, Jonathan, *The Enlightenment Bible: Translation, Scholarship, Culture*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005, especially chapter 5.

Heinrich Heine summarizes this aspect of neology quite accurately as follows: "[es] wurde der Versuch gemacht allen historischen Inhalt aus dem Christentum herauszunehmen und nur den moralischen Teil zu bewahren"[252] [it attempted to extract all the historical content of Christianity and leave only the moral part]. Extracting just the "moral part" of Christianity amounts to a purification of the biblical word. This process involves a latent skepticism of scripture that approximates the kind of skepticism we already encountered in Klopstock's "Heilige Poesie."[253] Here too we find a situation of subtle mistrust, whereby neologians doubt the adequacy of the biblical word (testimony and narratives) to express the "moral part" of scripture and feel compelled to speak on its behalf.

c. Orthodox Lutheranism

At the time of the *Fragmentenstreit*, orthodox Lutheranism was in its last, if not final phases and had already experienced its own version of enlightenment. Siegmund Jakob Baumgarten (1706–1757), the almost entirely forgotten older brother of Alexander Baumgarten (a name inextricably bound to aesthetics), was among those responsible for bringing enlightenment to orthodox Lutheranism by weaving Wolff's rigorous mathematical method into the practice of theology.[254] Even though Siegmund might not have secured himself a place in posterity quite to the extent that his younger brother did, one finds his legacy very much alive in a student of his

[252] Heine, Heinrich, *Zur Geschichte der Religion und Philosophie in Deutschland*, Hamburg: Tredition Classics, 2016. Modified translation mine. In this particular passage, Heine describes the historical critical methodology of Johann Semler, another leading figure within neology.
[253] See my chapter 1.
[254] For a sense of Baumgarten's wider effects within Protestant theology, see Sorkin, David, *The Religious Enlightenment: Protestants, Jews, and Catholics from London to Vienna*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008.

who became the most vociferous advocate of Lutheran orthodoxy during the fragment controversy, namely, Goeze.[255] Goeze's theological training with Baumgarten undoubtedly influenced his attack on Lessing's style of argumentation—his so-called "Theaterlogik"—as well as the "inner truth" of Christianity, which Goeze understood to be aligned with a pietistic conception of inspired faith that gains its legitimacy through personal experience. Admittedly, Baumgarten's contribution to theology is actually quite extensive and cannot easily be contained solely under the banner of orthodoxy. In fact, several students of his—most notably Johann Salomo Semler (1725–1791)—would become advocates of neology, applying what they learned from Baumgarten to their own critiques of scripture and early church histories. Nevertheless, I associate him with orthodoxy to show a lineage of thought that ultimately culminates in Goeze. Most important to my exposition of Baumgarten is emphasizing those aspects of his theology that are visible in Goeze's polemics with Lessing. These aspects include common assumptions about the epistemic value of historical evidence and an inclination towards a rigorous style of theological argumentation.

Baumgarten began teaching at the University of Halle in 1730 and viewed the philosophy of Wolff as having enormous potential for theology. He was especially convinced that Wolffian philosophy could offer pietism the means to access a stronger, more sustained "union with God" than its sharply criticized confessional system of "Wiedergeburt" [rebirth], wherein religious subjects claimed to have direct access to divine grace through subjective experience. The task, for Baumgarten, was to purge the underlying enthusiasm built into this confessional model by insisting that the state of grace resulting from a union with God could only be achieved through constant

[255] During S. Baumgarten's own life, however, he was quite well known. Voltaire even referred to him as "the jewel in crown of German scholarship." See Sorkin, *The Religious Enlightenment*. p. 9.

labor rather than through a "*magische* Kraft auf das Herz"[256] [magical power exerted on the heart]. It was Wolff's philosophy that supplied the tools for carrying out this labor. Through it, Baumgarten managed to draw up a peace treaty between pietism and orthodox Lutheranism through their common pursuit of "vital knowledge," or knowledge that conditions the will and motivates action.[257] It should be noted that—for subsequent generations of orthodox theologians—this practical orientation around "vital knowledge" often conflicts with the more speculative forms of theology like that of deism and (to a lesser extent) neology.

Baumgarten was primarily attracted to the degree of "certainty" [Gewissheit] that Wolff's method promised. In his *Evangelische Glaubenslehre* (1759) he developed a methodical approach to scripture that examined all Christian dogma against the rule that "written revelation cannot contradict what human reason recognizes as true."[258] Baumgarten asserted that humanity had a responsibility to use its capacity for knowledge, which was acquired after the fall, to mediate between rational knowledge and religious belief. According to Baumgarten, God chose rational creatures to write the bible so that their impressions would always relate back to reason.[259] Above all, Baumgarten aspired to make the certainty of Wolff's methodology available for theology so that it would rest on an equal footing with science [Wissenschaft]. According to Baumgarten, theology becomes a science "when the divinity and incontrovertibility of scripture is demonstrable, and all truths are derived from it in a demonstrable and orderly manner, so that the necessity of the

[256] Quoted from Kemper, Hans-Georg, *Deutsche Lyrik der frühen Neuzeit*, Band 6/1, Empfindsamkeit, Tübingen: Niemeyer Verlag, 1997, p. 158. Translation mine.
[257] For a discussion of "vital knowledge" as being at odds with a rationalist tradition, see Gadamer, Hans-Georg, *Wahrheit und Methode*, Tübingen: Mohr, 1960.
[258] Quoted from Kemper, Hans-Georg, *Deutsche Lyrik der frühen Neuzeit*, Band 6/1, Empfindsamkeit, Tübingen: Niemeyer Verlag, 1997, p. 158.
[259] Ibid., p. 158.

conclusions can be referred back to their causes."[260] However, this methodology sets up a false equivalence between revelation and reason, one in which any truths derived from scripture must cohere into an "unbroken chain of reasoning" [Kette der Wahrheit].[261] Wolff's concept of coherence—which he takes for the criterion of reason—permeates Baumgarten's theology.[262] However, he deviates from Wolff's teachings in one crucial respect: he believes that a rigorous historical method can also achieve "outward" certainty. Wolff viewed history merely as the study of facts, which cannot attain the same kind of "inner" certainty as that of philosophy or mathematics. For history to achieve "outward" certainty the narrated events would have to be coherent and probable; the sources would have to be credible and authenticated; and eyewitness testimony would have to prove reliable. Baumgarten's effort to raise the status of historical knowledge to a level of certainty was motivated by the assumption that an ignorance of history—in this more systematic sense—was at the root of religious skepticism like that of deism. This demonstrates just how malleable history (testimony and narratives) was around the mid-eighteenth century—Baumgarten making use of it to strengthen faith, Reimarus to undermine it. According to Baumgarten, an ignorance of history opened the door to modern paraphrastics and efforts to bring specific Christian doctrines in line with popular sensibilities. The task of a rigorous historical method was, rather, to show the soundness of Christian doctrine, "to safeguard everyone against

[260] Quoted from David Sorkin, "Reclaiming Theology for the Enlightenment: The Case of Siegmund Jacob Baumgarten," *Central European History*, Vol. 36, No. 4, 2003, p. 503–30.
[261] The metaphor is Wolff's; see *Vernünftige Gedanken von den Kräften des menschlichen Verstandes: und ihrem richtigen Gebrauche in Erkenntnis der Wahrheit*, Chapter 2, § 40.
[262] Wolff, Christian, *Vernünfftigen Gedancken von Gott, der Welt und der Seele des Menschen, auch allen Dingen überhaupt, anderer Theil, bestehend in ausführlichen Anmerckungen*, Hildesheim: G. Olms, 1983, chapter 3, § 370: "Je mehr man den Zusammenhang der Wahrheiten einsiehet, je mehr hat man vernunfft" [The more one sees the cohesion between the truths, the more reason one possesses]. Translation mine.

the equally incorrect ways of disorderly and exaggerated dissatisfaction as well as complacency with the present state of the church; to set limits to complaints about the decline of Christianity; to check the impulse for renewal; and to guard against headstrong partisanship and devotion."[263] The effect of his work was, therefore, quite profound; it incentivized a generation of theologians to bring systematic rigor to the study of history, specifically as a means of guarding Christianity against the threat of external criticism. With this in mind, Lessing's argument that contingent truths of history can never attain the kind of certainty promised here must have been particularly devastating for theologians (like Goeze) who adhered to Baumgarten's teachings.

Situating Lessing within this theological landscape is particularly difficult owing to the fact that elements of all three confessional systems can be found in his religious thought. He valued Reimarus' deism, praising him as the "ideal opponent of religion" who proved that the biblical narratives cannot secure a rational foundation for Christianity. Like many neologians, Lessing also wanted to make moral improvement rather than obedience central to religion. In his later years (1771–80), he even became increasingly attracted to orthodoxy's positive system of faith—specifically that it neither rejected nor mediated revealed knowledge, but wholly accepted it.[264] There is no question, however, that Lessing remained deeply unsatisfied with his theological options at the time. In a letter written to his brother Karl at the start of the fragment controversy, we find a vivid description of his discontent:

> Nicht das unreine Wasser, welches längst nicht mehr zu brauchen, will ich beibehalten wissen: ich will es nur nicht eher weggegossen wissen, als bis man

[263] Quoted from Sorkin, David, *The Religious Enlightenment: Protestants, Jews, and Catholics from London to Vienna*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008, p. 149.
[264] Dilthey, Wilhelm, *Das Erlebnis und die Dichtung: Lessing, Goethe, Novalis, Hölderlin*, durchgesehene aufl., Leipzig: Reclam, 1991. p. 88f.

> weiß, woher reineres zu nehmen; ich will nur nicht, daß man es ohne Bedenken weggieße, und sollte man auch das Kind hernach im Mistjache baden. Und was ist sie anders, unsere neuemodische Theologie, gegen die Orthodoxie, als Mistjache gegen unreines Wasser?[265]
>
> [I do not want the impure water, long unusable, to be preserved; it is only that I do not want it to be poured away before we know where we can get purer water; I only do not want it foolishly poured out, leaving the child to be bathed in sewage. And what else is our new-fashioned theology, as compared with orthodoxy, but sewage as compared with impure water?]

Lessing never abandons a critical stance toward the "impure" and "long unusable" waters of orthodoxy, yet still prefers it to the detestable "sewage" [Mistjache] of both neology and deism [neuemodische Theologie]. By closing itself off to criticism, orthodoxy makes piety and enlightenment incompatible, while deism and neology obscure the distinction between reason and faith, resulting in a "religion of reason" [Sanction der Religion der Vernunft].[266] Lessing—himself being "a child" [das Kind] of the enlightenment—appears trapped in a tragically intolerable situation in which he must decide between the lesser of two evils. These circumstances motivated Lessing to publish the fragments and search for another way of securing religious faith.

There is just one more issue that needs to be addressed before moving on to Lessing's critique of the letter of religion. From what we have just seen, modern theology represents the greater threat to Christianity,[267] and Lessing hoped that in publishing the fragments he would entice

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[265] See Lessing, *Briefe*, 2 February 1774. Translation mine.
[266] See Lessing, *Gegensätze des Herausgebers*, in *Werke und Briefe*, Band 8, hrsg. von Arno Schilson, Frankfurt am Main: Deutsche Klassiker Verlag, 1989, p. 316.
[267] In that same letter to his brother (2 February 1774), Lessing continues to describe the extent to which he "approves" of orthodoxy over neology: "Mit der Orthodoxie war man, Gott sei Dank, ziemlich zu Rande; man hatte zwischen ihr und der Philosophie eine Scheidewand gezogen, hinter welcher eine jede ihren Weg fortgehen konnte, ohne die andere zu hindern. Aber was tut man nun? Man reißt diese Scheidewand nieder und macht uns unter dem Vorwande, uns zu vernünftigen Christen zu machen, zu höchst unvernünftigen Philosophen. Ich bitte dich, lieber Bruder, erkunde dich doch nur nach diesem Punkte genauer, und siehe etwas weniger auf das, was unsere neuen Theologen verwerfen, als auf das,

advocates of neology and deism to enter into a public debate with him. For the most part, however, the neologians remained silent during the controversy. Only Johann Semler (1725–1791) replied in his 1779 essay *Beantwortung der Fragmente eines Ungenannten*, but by that time Lessing's publication immunity had already been revoked and he died before having a chance to properly respond to Semler's essay.[268] Consequently, the bulk of the fragment controversy involves Lessing's polemics with Goeze and appears to be a critique limited to Lutheran orthodoxy. Prima facie this would seem to pose a problem for our study that attempts to read the fragment controversy as a crucible for analyzing Klopstock's *Messias*. However, a deeper look into the implications behind Lessing's critique of the "Buchstabe" shows his arguments to be applicable to the methodology governing Klopstock's notion of "heilige Poesie."

d. Excursus: Pietism

All three writers who are the subject of this study exhibit tendencies in keeping with pietist traditions, although of the three only Novalis was born into a pietist household. Regardless of their religious upbringing, some attention must be paid to pietism insofar as it was a source of influence for each writer. I should mention first that pietism was never an object of criticism for Lessing,

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was sie dafür in die Stelle setzen wollen. Darin sind wir einig, daß unser alters Religionssystem falsch ist: aber das möchte ich nicht mit dir sagen, daß es ein Stückwerk von Stümpern und halbphilosophen sei […] Flickwerk von Stümpern und halbphilosophen ist das Religionssytsem, welches man jetzt auf die Stelle des alten setzen will; und mit weit mehr Einfluß auf Vernunft und Philosophie, als sich das alte anmaßt" [Thankfully, orthodoxy was pretty much at the margins; one had drawn a partition between it and philosophy, behind which each could go its respective way without hindering the other. But what now? Now they are tearing down this partition and, under the pretext of making us rational Christians, are making us highly unreasonable philosophers. Dear brother, I ask you, explore this point more closely and look less at what our neologians reject and more at what they propose to put in its place. We agree that our old religious system is false, but I would not agree with you that it is a patchwork of bunglers and halfwit-philosophers, for that is what the system of religion is, with which people now want to replace the old; and with far more influence on reason and philosophy than the old one assumes]. Translation mine.

[268] Lessing's *Nachlass* indicates that he intended to respond to Semler in his *Sogennante Briefe an Verschiedene Gottesgelehrten* (1779–80).

even though (in his early writings) he disagreed with Klopstock over the role that feeling should play in theological reflection. In fact, as we will see from Lessing's *Gedanken über die Herrnhuter* (1750), he actively came to the defense of pietists who were being accused of Schwärmerei [fanaticism] by advocates belonging to one or another of the above theological systems. Thus, when I refer to "enlightenment theology" I do not mean to include pietism.

Some of the leading figures of pietism include (among others) Johann Arndt (1555–1621), Philip Jacob Spener (1635–1705), August Hermann Francke (1663–1727), Nikolaus Ludwig Zinzendorf (1700–1760), and Friedrich Christoph Oetinger (1702–1782). Rather than going through each pietist, I will focus mostly on the main arguments of Spener's *Pia Desideria* (1675) to provide a general sense of how pietism—which was itself an extremely diverse movement of religious renewal—developed at a time when the reformation was starting to fragment into different ideological sects. Spener wrote his *Pia Desideria*, or "pious wishes," in response to concerns about the spiritual well-being of the Lutheran church after the Thirty Years' War. He writes, for instance, in his opening salutations that the "precious spiritual body of Christ is now afflicted with distress and sickness."[269] The "sickness" had to do with a much broader political history of the Lutheran Church, which gradually came under the control of a vast and decentralized network of nobles competing with each other for more control over lands and resources. To maintain their control over territories, nobles formed alliances with high-ranking clerics who held similar ideological and political beliefs, making religious intolerance among competing regions inevitable.[270] By the seventeenth century it was common for princes to appoint clerics and

[269] Spener, Philipp Jacob, *Pia Desideria*, trans. Theodore G. Tappert, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1964, p. 31.
[270] There is a much more complex history between the regional nobilities and the clergy than I am able to present here. For a historical materialist account of these dynamics, see Engels, Friedrich, *The Peasant War in Germany*, 3rd edition, New York: International Publishers, 2006 (especially chapter 1).

ministers without the consent of the congregation. This produced hierarchies that were alienating for the average parishioner, who felt their ministers were more eager to win the favor of the nobles (often for material gain) than they were at promoting the spiritual well-being of the congregation. As a result, class distinctions within the Lutheran Church became increasingly more visible. Elite members of the church enjoyed, for instance, more luxurious seating arrangements and could request to have private baptisms, weddings, funerals, and communion services.[271] Much of Spener's *Pia Desideria* proposes ways to mitigate these unfavorable circumstances. Thus pietism must be considered a movement from within the Lutheran Church rather than outside of it.

Perhaps the most controversial proposal that Spener implemented was the *collegia pietatis*, which was a gathering of lay parishioners who wanted to be more involved in the culture of the Church by praying together or openly discussing passages from the bible and weekly sermon. Spener intended to extend some of the duties of ministers to lay parishioners so that they could also be qualified to spread the word of God to others—a gesture that essentially widened the application of Luther's *Große Katechismus* (1529), a text that functioned as a kind of training manual for preachers by elaborating on the significance of the ten commandments, the Apostles' Creed, the Lord's Prayer, baptism, and communion.[272] This brought Spener to his idea of a "universal priesthood" in which he believed redistributing the duties of the ministry onto all members of the congregation would help improve the overall state of the church. He pointed out that "one of the principal reasons why the ministry cannot accomplish all that it ought, is that it is

[271] See Theodore Tappert's introduction to Spener's *Pia Desideria*.
[272] In the preface to his *Große Katechismus*, Luther urges "all Christians [to read the catechism] but especially all pastors and preachers, that they should daily exercise themselves in the catechism, which is a short summary and epitome of the entire Holy Scriptures, and that they may always teach the same."

too weak without the help of the universal priesthood. One man is incapable of doing all that is necessary for the edification of the many who are generally entrusted to his pastoral care."[273] Initially the meetings took place at private residences and were regarded as "conventicles" that supplemented public worship, but once the meetings became too controversial, they were only permitted inside the church. Spener—who viewed the Early Church as the paragon of religious organization[274]—hoped that by giving parishioners an informal platform to discuss religious subjects they would feel more connected with their religious community. In this way, he hoped to counteract the established hierarchy by giving "the lower ranks opportunity to speak their minds without prejudice and with more freedom than is granted the upper ranks, who with their more mature reflection are allowed the honor of amending the proposals which others make."[275] By allowing the lower ranks to be heard the upper ranks might become more attuned to how they can better serve the members of their congregation. Spener believed (much like Lessing) that church leaders were too preoccupied with Christian doctrine, so a lot of the group discussions revolved around practical questions of how to lead a good Christian life.

However, what started as a movement designed to unify members of the church quickly became a source for even further alienation. As the *collegia pietatis* became more widespread among various churches, the conventicles started to gain a reputation for being divisive. Members who participated in the meetings grew highly critical of ministers and other parishioners they felt

[273] Spener, Philipp Jacob, *Pia Desideria*, trans. Theodore G. Tappert, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1964, p. 94–95.
[274] About the Early Church, Spener wrote: "it would perhaps not be inexpedient to reintroduce the ancient and apostolic kind of church meetings […] which Paul describes in I Corinthians 14:26–40. One person would not rise to preach (although this practice would be continued at other times), but others who have been blessed with gifts and knowledge would also speak and present their pious opinions on the proposed subject to the judgment of the rest, doing all this in such a way as to avoid disorder and strife." Ibid., p. 89.
[275] Ibid., pp. 32–33.

were not leading good Christian lives, which cultivated self-righteous, nearly puritanical attitudes that drew the *collegia pietatis* into open hostility with other members of the Lutheran Church. Because pietists believed that they knew more about what constitutes "true" Christianity than the more orthodox members of the Lutheran Church, they gradually became treated as outsiders.

The most relevant contribution that Spener made with respect to this study was his demand that Christians become familiar with "all of scripture," or *tota scriptura* as it appears in the Latin edition of his *Pia Desideria*. The problem for Spener was that Luther's doctrine of *sola scriptura* limited the teaching of scripture largely to the contents of the *Kleine Katechismus* (1529), which all Christians (especially children) were obliged to memorize. In Luther's preface to the *Kleine Katechismus* he expressed concern for "common people" who "have no knowledge whatsoever of Christian teaching," and then complained that "although the people are supposed to be Christian, baptized, and have received the holy sacrament, they do not know the Lord's Prayer, the Creed, or the Ten Commandments, and they live as if they were pigs and irrational beasts."[276] However, Spener believed that the "common people" of his day were sufficiently prepared to read more than just the prescribed amount of scripture, so he essentially called for an expansion of the canon. "Thought should be given," Spener wrote, "to a *more extensive use of the Word of God among us*."[277] For Spener and other pietists, learning the catechism was just a first step on the way to reading the entire bible on one's own, a prospect that would have terrified Luther, who seldom displayed confidence in the intelligence of "common people." Nevertheless, Spener remained

[276] Luther, Martin, *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, third edition, ed. Timothy F. Lull & William R. Russell, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012, pp. 322–23.
[277] Spener, Philipp Jacob, *Pia Desideria*, trans. Theodore G. Tappert, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1964, p. 87.

adamant that knowing all of scripture was necessary to improving the state of the church and the lives of its members:

> *all* Scripture, without exception, should be known by the congregation if we are all to receive the necessary benefit. If we put together all the passages of the Bible which in the course of many years are read to a congregation in one place, they will comprise only a very small part of Scriptures which have been given to us. The remainder is not heard by the congregation at all, or is heard only insofar as one or another verse is quoted or alluded to in sermons, without, however, offering any understanding of the entire context, which is nevertheless of the greatest importance.[278]

On the one hand, reducing scripture to its most essential parts (*Kleine Katechismus*) and providing preachers with blueprints for how to interpret those parts (*Große Katechismus*) stabilized the administration of the Lutheran Church. On the other hand, it created an environment in which the "Word of God" languished. Pietists grew bored of having to recite the same parts of scripture and having to listen to the same sermons. Spener's solution was to make parishioners responsible for knowing the "entire context" of scripture, which ideally would provide them with even more spiritual resources with which to secure their salvation. However, dissent against Spener's call for *tota scriptura* could quickly be heard within the orthodox ranks. For instance, Johannes Kromayer (1576–1643), the general superintendent of the Lutheran church in Weimar, argued against the call for *tota scriptura*, writing: "Dies ist eine irrige Meinung, daß ein jeder Christ so gar eine große Wissenschaft der göttlichen Lehre haben und die ganze Bibel bei Verlust seiner Seligkeit lesen müsse und gründlich verstehen."[279] [It is a misconception to think that every Christian must have

[278] Ibid., p. 88.
[279] Quoted from Wallmann, Johannes, "Was ist Pietismus?" in *Pietismus und Neuzeit: Ein Jahrbuch zur Geschichte des neueren Protestantismus*, Band 20, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1994, p. 11–28. Translation mine.

a scientific knowledge of divine instruction and must thoroughly read and understand the entire bible so as not to forfeit salvation]. As one critic aptly described, the orthodox response to Spener's *Pia Desideria* made Lutherans sound more like Catholics[280] insofar as they were trying to curtail the newly won freedom to read the bible without clerical mediation.

By the eighteenth century many of the changes that pietists like Spener advocated for were realized, bringing the movement into a kind of golden age.[281] The movement's desire for more authentic and dynamic religious experiences; its call for more responsive clerics and engaged parishioners; and its emphasis on social and ethical concerns were more or less absorbed into the mission of the Church. However, since pietists were often so critical of the present state of affairs within the church and always eager to introduce more sweeping changes, they often found themselves on the receiving end of some very harsh criticism. A significant amount of that criticism came from the secular world. This was because many pietists rejected how orthodox Lutheranism defined the "adiaphora," or practices that were not expressly forbidden by the bible and thus left up to the moral discretion of the individual. Theater, gambling, drinking, dancing were all deemed inappropriate by pietists. As a result, the secular world portrayed pietists less in terms of having an erudite command of "all of scripture" and more in terms of being fanatical in their display of religious sentiments, dishonest in their claim to having subjective experiences with Christ, and downright quioxtic when it came to their docrtrine of "Wiedergeburt" [rebirth] which designates the moment of one's true spiritual awakening or, in the case of Oetinger, enlightenment.[282] It was

[280] Ibid., p. 26.
[281] For a general account of eighteenth-century Pietism, see Stoeffler, F. Ernest, *German Pietism during the Eighteenth Century*, Leiden: Brill, 1973.
[282] Oetinger equated rebirth with enlightenment in his essay "On Enlightenment," arguing "the new birth and enlightenment are the same: The new birth comes through water and the Spirit, that is, by the

therefore common for critics to conflate pietism with mysticism and Schwärmerei [fanaticism]. For example, Gottsched attacked literature (like Klopstock's *Der Messias*) that advocated pietism. Gottsched viewed pietism as a source of Schwärmerei, writing "in Wahrheit, man muß sich gegentheils wundern, wie unsere Gottesgelehrten so still sitzen, und es nicht wahrnehmen, wie viel solche neue geistliche Lügenden, in diesen zur Freygeisterey und Religionsspöterey so geneigten Zeiten, dem wahren Christenthume schaden werden. Sie verfolgen mit einem löblichen Eifer die zinzendorfischen Schwärmereyen"[283] [In truth, one must be astonished at how our theologians remain so quiet and do not realise how much the new spiritual blasphemers, in these times that are so inclined to free thinking and religious mockery, will harm true Christianity. They advance the Zinzendorfian brand of fanaticism with a laudable zeal]. Louise Gottsched (1713–1762) was in complete agreement with her husband, though she refused to remain quite about the pietist "blasphemers." In her 1736 comedy *Pietiserey im Fischbeinrock* she deploys stereotypes (inscribed onto each character's name) and the figure of the Schwärmer to mount an attack against pietism. The play depicts the middle class "Glaubeleicht" family as being easily manipulated by a pietist charlatan named "Scheinfromm." Herr Scheinfromm claims to personally communicate with Christ and attempts to exploit this "relationship" to bleed the family of its financial assets, even suggesting that Christ wishes their daughter to marry his nephew so that Scheinfromm can make off with the dowry. Much of *Pietiserey im Fischbeinrock* is designed to expose what L.

heavenly power which flowed out physically from Jesus' side and was never known by our reason; but the enlightenment indicates to us that we are to appropriate as small innocent children these spiritual elements and to preserve them as a witness until we see truly how they have brought forth the new birth." Erb, Peter C., *The Pietists: Selected Writings*, New York: Paulist Press, 1983, p. 278–79.

[283] Gottsched, Johann Christoph, *Bescheidenes Gutachten, was von den bisherigen christlichen Epopeen der Deutschen zu halten sey?* in *Das Neuste aus der anmuthigen Gelehrsamkeit*, Nr. 1, Wintermonat, Leipzig, 1752, p. 71. Translation mine.

Gottsched believed to be the hypocrisy of pietism, and it represents just one satirical drama in a much larger body of anti-pietist literature.[284]

Beyond the secular world, at least one theologian heard Gottsched's battle cry against pietists: Siegmund Baumgarten. In his book *Klopstock: Religion und Dichtung* (1963), Gerhard Kaiser locates S. Baumgarten at the tip of the spear in a polemical campaign against pietist literature. Kaiser writes, "mit [Baumgartens] Erklärung gegen Zinzendorf von 1742 [gab er] das Signal für den Hauptangriff einer umfangreichen Streitschriftenliterature gegen die Brüdergemeine"[285] [with Baumgarten's statement against Zinzendorf in 1742, the signal was given for the main attack on the Moravian Brotherhood by means of extensive polemical literature]. Zinzendorf was the target of many enlightenment theologians simply because he rejected any effort to rationalize faith. In his *Thoughts for the Learned and Yet Good-Willed Students of Truth* (1732) Zinzendorf claimed that "religion can be grasped without the conclusions of reason; otherwise no one could have religion except the person with intelligence."[286] According to Zinzendorf, experience testifies to a very different reality, one in which "religion must be grasped […] through experience alone without any concepts."[287]

The neologians, many of whom were trained by Baumgarten, continued the fight against pietism from the mid- to late-eighteenth century, focusing much of their criticism on domesticating

[284] See Petig, William E., *Literary Antipietism in Germany During the First Half of the Eighteenth Century*, New York: Peter Lang, 1984. In addition to L. Gottsched's play, between 1736 and 1745 two other anti-pietistic plays made their way to the Leipzig book market: Johann Christian Krüger's *Die Geistlichen auf dem Lande* (1743), and Christian Fürchtegott Gellert's *Die Betschwester* (1745).
[285] Kaiser, Gerhard, *Klopstock: Religion und Dichtung*, Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1963, p. 130. Translation mine.
[286] See Zinzendorf's *Thoughts for the Learned and Yet Good-Willed Students of Truth* in: Erb, Peter C., *The Pietists: Selected Writings*, New York: Paulist Press, 1983, p. 291.
[287] Ibid.

the excessive religious feelings associated with pietists like Zinzendorf. That is to say, neologians were less interested in dismissing religious feelings as such, and more interested in raising them to the level of rational consciousness. For example, Johann Joachim Spalding (1714–1804) dedicated his book *Gedanken Über den Werth der Gefühle in dem Christenthum* (1761) to this cause. Both a great admirer of Shaftesbury[288] (1671–1713) and a leading figure behind the practically oriented "Popularphilosophie,"[289] Spalding wanted to be able to distinguish true religious feelings sent by God from natural "changes of the soul," writing:

> die Gefühle, welche bisweilen im Anfange und Fortgange des Christenthums, als so notwendig, erfordert werden, müssen freylich einen unschätzbaren Werth haben, so bald man sich berechtiget hält, sie, als eigentliche Wirkungen Gottes, anzusehen; und so bald man glaubt, daß man eben durch die unmittelbare Empfindung und durch das Gefühl selbst die übernatürlichen Eindrücke des göttlichen Geistes erkennen und von den natürlichen Veränderungen der Seele unterscheiden können.[290]
>
> [the feelings which are sometimes required as so necessary to the beginning and progress of Christianity, must of course have an inestimable value as soon as one considers oneself entitled to regard them as the actual effects of God; and as soon as it is believed that it is precisely through immediate sensation and feeling itself that one can discern the supernatural impressions of the divine spirit and distinguish them from the natural changes of the soul.]

Here Spalding proves to be more interested in training himself to make intuitive judgments about his own affective economy than he is with polemically rejecting feeling as such. The aim of his investigation, then, is about being able to enjoy feelings that are properly religious and not to

[288] For a recent article on Spalding and his ties with Shaftesbury, see Printy, Michael, "The Determination of Man: Johann Joachim Spalding and the Protestant Enlightenment," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol. 74. no. 2, 2013, pp. 189–212.
[289] For a general overview of Popularphilosophie, see chapter 6 of Beiser, Friedrich, *The Fate of Reason: German Philosophy from Kant to Fichte*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987.
[290] Spalding, Johann Joachim, *Gedanken über den Werth der Gefühle in dem Christenthum (1761)*, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005, p. 47. Translation mine.

confuse them with feelings occasioned by natural inclinations. This constitutes the foundation of Spalding's theological project, which he had spelled out earlier in his *Die Bestimmung des Menschen* (1748), a book that would become a huge success in the eighteenth century, capturing the attention of Mendelssohn, Kant, Goethe, Schiller, and Fichte who in 1799 would published his own book under that same title.[291] In Spalding's *Bestimmung* he describes the moral dimension of his project, which involves being able to control one's passions so as to act in accordance with Christian virtues. He begins the treatise by acknowledging that he possesses the capacity to choose and should therefore not act blindly or follow the "swarm," but determine beforehand how to properly conduct himself.[292]

> Mein Wehrt und meine Glückseligkeit soll nur darin bestehen, daß die oberherrschaftlichen Aussprüche der Wahrheit, unbetäubt durch den Tumult der Leidenschaften und der eigennützigen Begierden, allen meine Handlungen leiten; daß die reine Empfindung dessen, was sich schickt, meine eigentliche höchste Verbindlichkeit ausmache, und daß ich also überhaupt in einem jeden Augenblicke meines Lebens das sey möge, wozu meine Natur und die allgemeine Natur Dinge mich bestimmen.[293]
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> [My worth and my happiness shall consist only in this: that the highest sayings of truth, unsullied by the tumult of the passions and by selfish desires, shall alone guide my actions; that a pure sense of that which is proper may truly constitute my

[291] Printy, Michael, "The Determination of Man: Johann Joachim Spalding and the Protestant Enlightenment," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol. 74. no. 2, 2013, pp. 189–90.
[292] "Da ich nun unläugbar eine Fähigkeit zu wählen und in meinen Entschuließungen eines dem andern vorzuziehen an mir finde: so muß ich auch hierbey nicht blindlings zufahren, sondern vorher nach meinem besten Vermögen auszumachen suchen, welcher Weg für mich der sicherste, anständigste und vortheilhafteste sey […] Wenn ich dem einen Schwarme folge, so bin ich allemal sicher, von dem andern entweder verlacht oder verdammet zu werden" [As I now undeniably have the ability to choose and prefer one thing over the other in my moral decisions, I should not act blindly, but instead try to figure out beforehand, according to the best of my abilities, which path is the most secure, most upstanding, and most advantageous. [But] if I follow one crowd [i.e. Schwärmers/fanatics], I am sure that I will either be laughed at or damned by the other]. Spalding, Johann Joachim, *Die Bestimmung des Menschen (1748–1794)*, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006, p. 43. Translation mine.
[293] Ibid., p. 13. Translation mine.

highest obligation, and that I may be at every moment of my life that which is determined by my own nature and by the general nature of things.]

The moral sense tradition weighs heavy in this passage as the figure of the lawgiver is internalized into the speaker, who sees his "highest obligation" as cultivating a moral capacity to determine for himself a "pure sense of what is proper." Yet the more orthodox critics of pietism did not share Spalding's relatively liberal views and were fearful that the church might become increasingly irrelevant if believers started to appeal to their own subjective capacities and feelings rather than using the church as mediating institution.

It was orthodox intolerance that motivated Lessing to defend pietism in his treatise *Gedanken über die Herrnhuter* (1750). The ethical orientation of Lessing's theology was very much influenced by the pietist tradition, especially by pietists like Zinzendorf who rejected enlightenment theology's obsession with Christian doctrine by reasserting the primacy of a practical religion. Lessing echoes this conception of faith when he states: "Der Mensch ward zum Tun und nicht zum Vernünfteln erschaffen. Aber eben deswegen, weil er nicht dazu erschaffen ward, hängt er diesem mehr als jenem nach. Seine Bosheit unternimmt allezeit das, was er nicht soll, und seine Verwegenheit allezeit das, was er nicht kann"[294] [Man was created for action and not for speculation. However, for the very reason that he was not created for it, he dwells more on the latter than on the former. His wickedness always leads him to what he should not, and his audacity to what he cannot do]. To prove his point, Lessing turns to the history of philosophy for evidence and then finds that the history of religion suffers a similar fate.

[294] Lessing, *Werke in drei Bänden*, München: Deutsche Taschenbuch Verlag, 2003, Band III, p. 272. Translation mine.

According to Lessing, Socrates represents the pinnacle of ancient philosophy. Socrates ushered in the "Glückselige Zeiten, als der Tugendhafteste der Gelehrteste war! Als alle Weisheit in kurzen Lebensregeln bestand!"[295] [What happy times when the most learned were the most virtuous! When all wisdom consisted of short rules for living]. However, after him it quickly fell into a state of decline: "Nur wenige von seinen [Socrates] Jüngern gingen den von ihm gezeigten Weg. Plato fing an zu träumen, und Aristoteles zu schließen"[296] [Only a few of Socrates' disciples followed the path he showed them. Plato began to dream, and Aristotle to syllogize]. The same fate was in store for modern philosophy, which, according to Lessing, also fell into a state of ruin shortly after Descartes managed to restore a sense of dignity to truth following a long period of scholastic decadence. "Die Wahrheit," Lessing wrote, "schien unter seinen Händen eine neue Gestalt zu bekommen" [The truth appeared to be given a new form under Descartes' hand]. However, Descartes' disciples found his "Weltweisheit noch allzuviel praktisches" [worldly wisdom all too practical], and decided to subject his philosophy to a new "Meßkunst"[297] [art of calculating]. Under this new paradigm, philosophers were only able to "fill their heads, while their hearts remained empty" ("So füllen sie den Kopf, und das Herz bleibt leer"[298]).

It is at this point in his argument that Lessing shifts to a discussion of religion, in which he discovers a similar pattern of development. He begins by describing religion as quite simple at its inception. "Wie einfach, leicht und lebendig war die Religion des Adams?" [How simple, easy, and lively was the religion of Adam?]. Similar to the fate of philosophy, Adam's descendants all

[295]Ibid., p. 272. Translation mine.
[296] Ibid., p. 273. Translation mine.
[297] Ibid., p. 273. Translation mine.
[298] Ibid., p. 274. Translation mine.

wanted to add their own opinons and "willkürlichen Sätzen" [arbitrary propositions] to religion, which initiated a period of religious decadence. Consequently, "Alle waren der Wahrheit untreu geworden, nur einige weniger, als die andern" [all had become unfaithful to the truth, only some less than others]. Eventually, "nur wenige einen richtigen Begriff von Gott behielten"[299] [only a few retained a true concept of God]. Like Descartes, Christ enters the scene and is able "to bring religion out from its state of darkness" by teaching that "Gott ist ein Geist, den sollt ihr im Geist anbeten"[300] [God is a spirit that one should worship in spirit]. Shortly after Christ and following the further advances made by the Early Church Fathers, Lessing identifies another period of decline. Suddenly a new group of theologians emerged and wanted "ihre Religion auszuschmücken, ihre Lehrsätze in eine gewisse Ordnung zu bringen, und die göttliche Wahrheit mit menschlichen Beweisen zu unterstützen"[301] [to amplify their religion, to bring their doctrines into a certain order, and to reinforce divine truth with human proofs]. Lessing believes that enlightenment theology is oriented around this paradigm, in which "die Vernunft führte euch auf einen andern Irrweg" [reason has led people onto another erroneous path]. From this brief sketch of religious history Lessing arrives at the conclusion that "ein wahrer Christ weit seltner, als in den dunklen Zeiten geworden. Der Erkenntnis nach sind wir Engel, und dem Leben nach Teufel. "[302] [A true Christian has become more rare than in the Dark Ages. In knowledge we are like angels, but in our manner of living like the Devil]. In other words, enlightenment theology has lost sight of religion's original mission of providing practical wisdom to its followers.

[299] Ibid., p. 274. Translation mine.
[300] Ibid., p. 275. Translation mine.
[301] Ibid., p. 276. Translation mine.
[302] Ibid., p. 277. Translation mine.

Following this rather short and sweeping history of religion, Lessing identifies pietism as counter-movement that has the potential to steer religion back onto the right path. In describing Zinzendorf's practically oriented teachings, Lessing was able to overlook the critique of religious enthusiasm that orthodox polemics waged, claiming instead that pietists like Zinzendorf wanting to renew the ethical mission of the church were the "true theologians." In fact, many of Lessing's theological arguments apply this line of thinking. As I will show in the next section, Lessing's criticism of the letter of religion must have drawn lessons from pietists like Zinzendorf and Spener. Spener's criticism against frivolously erudite theologians, interested only in winning polemical arguments rather than providing parishioners with ethical guidance, sounds strikingly similar to Lessing's critique of enlightenment theology. For example, the following lines from Spener could easily be mistaken for Lessing's: "They think that everything has turned out very well if only they know how to give answers to the errors of the papists, the Reformed, the Anabaptists, etc. [But] they pay no attention to the fruits of those articles of faith which we presumably still hold in common with them or of those rules of morality which are acknowledged by us all."[303] Like Spener and Zinzendorf, Lessing seeks to redirect theology back to the ethos of scripture, which serves as the common root of the various religious sects.

[303] Spener, Philipp Jacob, *Pia Desideria*, trans. Theodore G. Tappert, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1964, p. 49.

IV. Against the Letter: Lessing's Copernican Turn in Religious Consciousness

In his monumental study *Zur Geschichte der Religion und Philosophie in Deutschland* (1834), Heine famously asserted that "seit Luther hat Deutschland keinen größeren und besseren Mann hervorgebracht, als Gotthold Ephraim Lessing"[304] [since Luther, Germany has produced no greater nor better man than Gotthold Ephraim Lessing]. What earned Lessing a seat next to Luther in Heine's pantheon of German heroes was his revolt against the privileged status of the letter in the dominant confessional systems of his day. According to Heine, Lessing triggered a "spiritual revolution" that would realize the legacy of Luther's religious liberation to an even greater degree. However, upon closer scrutiny Heine's analogy seems more seductive than precise, for several reasons. As is widely known, Luther turned the letter into a weapon. This is perhaps most pronounced in his *Ninety-Five Theses* (1517), in which Luther accused church leaders of corrupting the sacrament of penance by authorizing a "human doctrine" [indulgences] that forged a transactional relationship between contrition and absolution. Exposing this corruption was central to Luther's *Ninety-Five Theses:* "They preach only human doctrines who say that as soon as the money clinks into the money chest, the soul flies out of purgatory."[305] Believers could purchase indulgences to mitigate the amount of temporal punishment they owed for their transgressions, and much of these funds, as Luther implied, helped to finance the construction of the costly St. Peter's Basilica—a monumental insult to the abject poverty that afflicted many

[304] See Heine, Heinrich, *Zur Geschichte der Religion und Philosophie in Deutschland*, Hamburg: Tredition Classics, 2016, p. 76. Translation mine.
[305] Luther, Martin, *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, ed. Timothy F. Lull and William R. Russell, third edition, Fortress Press, 2012, #27, p. 11.

Christians.[306] The ethical implications of selling indulgences was a source of anxiety for Luther, who felt that it was "very harmful if [believers] lost their fear of God because of [indulgences]." For Luther, purchasing an indulgence is merely an outward sign of atonement; true atonement can only take place through genuine "works of love,"[307] which help a person to become better. Not only was this practice harmful to the moral integrity of Christians, it also debased the office of preaching. "Injury is done [to] the Word of God," Luther wrote, "when, in the same sermon, an equal or larger amount of time is devoted to indulgences than to the Word."[308] For Luther the Word of God was the real treasure of Christianity, and prior to the selling of indulgences it was the gospel that served as the "nets with which one formerly fished for men of wealth. The treasures of indulgences," by contrast, "are the nets with which one now fishes for the wealth of men." In many ways Luther's fanaticism for the Word of God (as opposed to "human doctrines") is linked with his effort to reclaim the dignity of the Church and its followers by exposing the hypocrisy and corruption of Rome. Most important in our context, under Luther's watch the doctrine of *sola scriptura* became a pillar of the Protestant faith, making the bible increasingly more authoritative and impervious to external criticism. Finally, with the help of the letter, Luther insulated reformers from unauthorized, humanist readings of scripture, which theologians advanced in order to clear up obscurities that were a source of bitter controversy among biblical scholars.

In the context of Luther's theology, humanist readings of scripture employed the fourfold sense of scripture, which included the literal, allegorical, tropological, and anagogical senses (or

[306] See #86: "Why does not the pope, whose wealth is today greater than the wealth of the richest Crassus, build this one basilica of St. Peter with his own money rather than with the money of poor believers."
[307] Ibid., #44, 11. "Because love grows by works of love, a person thereby becomes better. A person does not, however, become better by means of indulgences but is merely freed from penalties."
[308] Ibid., #54, 11.

modes of reading) that became an object of criticism for Luther and his followers.[309] Luther found it absurd and impractical to subsume the content of scripture under four generic categories that enabled readers to easily extract whatever they wanted from it, arguing instead that 'scripture is its own interpreter.'[310] Consequently, Lutheranism privledged the literal mode of interpreting scripture at the expense of the other modes.[311] Humanists, by contrast, employed the various modes of interpretation to supplement scriptures literal meaning (*sensus literalis*), which, at the same time, was a means of preserving its moral integrity–gaurding it against any ethically compromising contradictions, paradoxes, and content. By maintaining the moral integrity of scripture through these various modes, humanists hoped to make knowledge of scripture more "vivid" to listeners.[312] Nevertheless, Luther vociferously rejected allegorical readings of scripture. In part, his refusal to endorse this mode of readings had to do with a fear that self-appointed religious fanatics [Schwärmer] would feel more at liberty to claim they were called on by God to preach, when in fact these "callings" were often a ruse in which the figurative meaning of scripture

[309] For a comprehensive work on the subject of the fourfold sense of scripture in the medieval context see Lubac, Henri de. *Medieval Exegesis: The Four Senses of Scripture, Vol. 1*-3. Eerdmans, 1998. See also Szondi, Peter, *Introduction to Literary Hermeneutics*, trans. Martha Woodmansee, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995, especially chapter 3, p. 29–35. "The allegorical meaning relates the passage to the story of the life and sufferings of Christ […] in the tropological, or moral meaning, the passage is applied to the situation of the individual, as instructions about how to lead one's life. In the interpretation of anagogical meaning, finally, the frame of reference is eschatology" (p. 34).

[310] Henri de Lubac describes Luther's antagonistic stance toward medieval exegesis, writing that nearly "all of Protestantism ended up following his [Luther's] lead. Rullus of Basel, for example, repudiated 'the figment of the scholastics regarding the fourfold sense of scripture'" (9). Lubac, Henri de. *Medieval Exegesis: The Four Senses of Scripture, Vol. 1*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998.

[311] For an outstanding study on the political theology behind Luther's claim that 'scripture interprets itself' see Mjaaland, Marius Timmann. *The Hidden God: Luther, Philosophy, and Political Theology*. Indiana University Press, 2016.

[312] "Vivid knowledge" refers to knowledge that exerts an influence on human action and the will. See Szondi, *Introduction to Literary Hermeneutics*, p. 36.

was intentionally distorted to manipulate the public.[313] Against these kinds of readings, Luther wrote:

> Scripture calls all those who teach their own laws false prophets, false priests, deceivers, seducers, wolves, ravenous animals, of whom He says in Jeremiah 23:32, "They have led my people astray when I did not send them or charge them to teach such things." I fight so that everyone may understand the true difference between divine Scripture and human teachings […] so that a Christian heart does not buy the one for the other—straw for gold, hay for silver, and wood for jewels.[314]

Luther was himself partly to blame for the rise in false prophets. His translation of the bible led to the increased spiritual autonomy of reformers who could begin to confide in the word of God on their own rather than needing to listen to the (corrupt) words of the clergy. In this way, Luther put a powerful instrument in the hands of reformers, but it was an instrument that would become an engine for social and political transformation that even he could not control.[315] Nevertheless, Luther worked tirelessly to centralize the authority of the reformation as a means of protecting the reformed Church against false prophets and false translations of the bible. For instance, he insisted that the office of preaching be won through appointment only, rather than through individual claims of having direct communication with God or special insight into the figurative meaning of scripture.

The aim of such measures was to make it more difficult for "fanatical" agitators like Thomas Müntzer (1489–1525) to use the word of God to achieve concrete political objectives such

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[313] See Klein, Lawrence and La Vopa, Anthony, *Enthusiasm and Enlightenment in Europe, 1650–1850*, San Marino, Ca.: Huntington Library, 1998, especially La Vopa's essay "The philosopher and the Schwärmer: on the Career of a German Epithet from Luther to Kant."
[314] See Luther, "Concerning the Letter and the Spirit," in *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*.
[315] For more on the social and political effects of Luther's translation of the bible see Sheehan, Jonathan, *The Enlightenment Bible: Translation, Scholarship, Culture*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005, especially chapter 1: "The Vernacular bible: Reformation and Baroque."

as those expressed in the twelve articles of the peasants.[316] In fact, Müntzer was denied support by Luther even after directly appealing to him on behalf of the peasantry. "Dear brother," Müntzer wrote, "cease your waiting and hesitation. It is time, for summer is at the door. Keep not friendship with the ungodly who hinder the Word from working its full force. Flatter not your princes, or you will perish with them."[317] The problem was that Luther reserved all his passion for the fight against corruption within the Church: "Since we punish thieves with the sword, murderers with the halter, and heretics with fire, why do we not turn on all those evil teachers of perdition, those popes, cardinals and bishops, and the entire swarm of the Roman Sodom *with arms in hand, and wash our hands in their blood*."[318] In order for the "full force" of the word to be experienced in the secular world, Müntzer believed that revolution (not reform) was the proper course of action. Luther, however, had allied himself with the nobles and did not wish to extend the revolutionary potential of the reformation to dismantling feudal structures that were a constant source of poverty and suffering for the peasants. Eventually Luther would explicitly condemn the peasant uprising and describe Müntzer as "the arch devil who […] commits nothing but theft, murder, and bloodshed."[319]

Münzter and Luther had fundamental disagreements over the status of the letter/spirit distinction. Whereas Luther believed the letter of religion was central both to emancipating reformers from the Church and to bringing about confessions of faith, Müntzer viewed its significance as far more limited both in terms of what the letter could offer reformed faith and how

[316] The preface to the twelve articles explicitly cites that one of its objectives is to "remove the reproach from the word of God […] and give a Christian justification for the disobedience or even the revolt of the entire peasantry." Quoted from Engels, Friedrich. *The Peasant War in Germany*, third edition, New York: International Publishers, 2006, p. 87.
[317] Ibid., p. 25.
[318] Ibid., p. 17.
[319] See Luther's pamphlet *Against the Thieving and Murderous Gangs of Peasants* (1525).

it might actually lead to new problems. Given that Müntzer's theology was structured by a form of medieval mysticism that stressed the importance of having personal experiences with God when confessing one's faith, he immediately found himself at cross-purposes with Luther. According to Müntzer, the scrupulous study of the letter of religion only gives believers insight into the historical experiences of those who have already heard the word of God. This is not enough for Münzter, who argued that these experiences were still vital for faith in the sixteenth century: "that is why all the prophets [say]: 'this *is* the word of the Lord.' They do not say: this is what the Lord said, as if it had happened in the past; rather, they speak with regard to the here and now."[320] Müntzer's point is that experiences like these bring believers into contact with the spirit of religion, which conditions the will and legitimizes confessions of faith: "The human heart," Müntzer wrote, "is the parchment upon which the finger of God inscribes his unchanging will and eternal wisdom."[321] Furthermore, Müntzer feared that investing too much value in the letter of religion would have adverse effects on reformed faith. He wrote that theologians "will now dupe [Christians] with a new kind of logic, with the deception of the word of God [which] extols the holy scriptures, covering all those books in ink and endlessly gabbing 'believe, believe'—while denying the advent of faith."[322] In fact, in his *Prague Manifesto* Müntzer insinuated that Luther's attempt to hold a monopoly on the letter of religion makes "a mockery of the Spirit of Christ" and reproduces problems similar to that of selling indulgences. He wrote, "[Luther and his reformers] did not hear the ordinances of God, as implanted in all his creatures […] they only heard from them the naked

[320] Quoted from Taubes, Jacob, *Occidental Eschatology*, trans. David Ratmoko, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009, p. 111 (emphasis added).
[321] Ibid.
[322] Ibid., p. 110–11.

word [bloße Schrift] which as murderers and thieves they stole from the Bible, never having heard it themselves from the mouth of God."[323] In the eyes of Müntzer, Luther was himself duped and the best way for Christians to avoid a similar fate was to suffer for themselves: "Before man can be sure of salvation, there must come so many turbulent waters, with their awful roar, that he loses the will to live, because the storm waves of this wild sea consume many who think they have already won the battle."[324] In the end, Müntzer believed that the word of God did not have the power to bring about faith, but could only bear witness to faith. True faith, by contrast, can only be forged through personal experience with the spirit of religion, and Müntzer's larger contribution to theology was, as one scholar put it, to "secularize the spirit of religion by externalizing the inner light of mysticism onto the world."[325] Externalizing the spirit of religion created chiliastic expectations within the horizon of existing social and political realities. His message to a group of miners was clear enough: "with the advent of faith we all, earthly people made of flesh, must become gods […] so that our earthy life soars into heaven." It was precisely this element within Müntzer's theology that caused Luther to condemn the peasant movement as being overtly fanatical, yet, as we will see, Müntzer's chiliasm finds continuity in Lessing's religious writings.

Before moving on to Lessing, I want to show that Luther's theology of the letter was not only at odds with advocates of the peasant movement, but that it also created controversy among establishment theologians like Erasmus von Rotterdam (1466–1536). For Erasmus it was self-evident that the literal meaning of scripture sometimes posed difficulties for the Church. This was

[323] Ibid.
[324] Ibid., p. 115.
[325] Taubes, Jacob, "Thomas Müntzer: The Theology of Revolution," in *Occidental Eschatology*, trans. David Ratmoko, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009, 106f.

especially clear with respect to the role of free will in matters of salvation. On this issue Erasmus asked whether or not "our [free] will contributes anything to our eternal salvation [or] whether everything we do, good or evil, is done out of mere necessity [i.e. according to divine grace]."[326] Unlike Luther, Erasmus believed that a consensus on the literal meaning of scripture was not given, and that in certain cases, like the question of free will, further "human" elaboration was needed. This led to the famous polemic between Luther and Erasmus. In his discourse on *The Free Will*, Erasmus wrote, "if [Luther] objects: 'what can large numbers contribute to an understanding of the spirit?' I answer: what can a small number? […] If [he] says: 'what can a philosophical understanding contribute?' I answer: what can ignorance?"[327] Rather than assuming that God arbitrarily distributes grace according to a necessity that human reason has no access to, Erasmus used scripture to propose a synthesis between necessity and freedom. According to Erasmus, the human will does have a say in its own salvation insofar as it must choose whether or not to receive grace and turn towards faith. In response, Luther protested:

> I frankly confess, that I should not want free will to be given me, even if it could be, nor anything else be left in my own hands to enable me to strive after my salvation. [For] I should be forced to labor with no guarantee of success and to beat the air only […] my conscience would never reach comfortable certainty as to how much it must do to satisfy God […] But now that God has put my salvation out of the control of my own will and put it under His control […] according to His grace and mercy, I rest fully assured.[328]

Because Luther assumes that human reason enjoys no comfortable certainty with respect to how our actions might satisfy God, he abandons the possibility that free will has any power to alter the course of what is predetermined. Be that as it may, it already starts to become clear how

[326] See Erasmus, Desiderius, *Discourse on Free Will: Erasmus–Luther*, ed. Ernst F. Winter et al., London: Continuum, 1996, p. 14–15.
[327] Ibid., p. 24.
[328] Ibid., p. 138–39.

Lessing's theology not only deviates from Luther's, but appears more in tune with his adversary. In Lessing's theology, further human elaboration into scripture is non-negotiable; since revealed knowledge never carries the force of certain truth it can and should be subjected to criticism. Moreover, without being able to criticize the bible, the aesthetic underpinnings of Lessing's theology would be completely irrelevant and there would be no prospect for a participatory regime of faith that allows religious subjects to use the bible as an instrument for self-improvement. To bring this back to Heine, it seems to be a rather spurious analogy to place Lessing side by side with Luther, and one that eclipses many of the significant differences between their respective theologies.

Luther advanced a far more radical argument against humanist interpretations of the *sensus spiritus* of scripture in his polemic against Jerome Emser (1478–1527). Emser thought it was too simplistic to argue that every complex problem in the church could be resolved by directly appealing to the bible. By contrast, Luther seemed to categorically oppose any form of human amplification beyond the literal meaning (sensus literalis) of scripture:

> The Holy Spirit is the simplest writer and adviser in heaven and earth. That is why his words could have no more than the one simplest meaning which we call the written one, or the literal meaning of the tongue. But written words and spoken language cease to have meaning when the things which have a simple meaning through interpretation by a simple word are given further meanings and thus become different things [through a different interpretation] so that one thing takes on the meaning of another […] one should not therefore say that Scripture or God's word has more than one meaning.[329]

Not only was Emser a target here, so too was Augustine, who in his *On Christian Doctrine* established a canonical approach to biblical exegesis that defies this rationale and proves to be

[329] See Luther, "Concerning the Letter and the Spirit," in *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, p. 56.

much more flexible than Luther's preferred hermeneutic agenda.[330] For Luther, the "sheer murderous noise of raging amplification [only] strengthens [his] cause, [which] is well grounded in scripture," whereas Emser's appeal to the spirit of religion was, according to Luther, built "upon human dreams."[331] Even though enlightenment theology grew out of the soil of the reformation, it bore very different fruits. As we have seen in Klopstock's religious poetry, amplification is at the heart of his project, which aspires to invest the letter of religion with more potent affects. Furthermore, the efforts made by neologians to purify scripture of apparent contradictions through paraphrastics also require "human" interventions that defy the doctrine of sola scriptura. But Lessing's theology of spirit is perhaps the most radical deviation from Luther's theological imperative against humanist readings of scripture. Not only did Lessing embrace Erasmus' argument that theologians should debate scripture to build institutional consensus, he also relocated the authority of religion in its spirit rather than in its letter. For Lessing, the letter is no longer static; rather, it represents a host of provisional, human attempts to capture the ethos of religion. Modernity must have the right to amplify, modify, negate, or uphold the letter of religion so that the spirit can be illuminated according to the demands of a particular historical moment.[332]

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[330] See Augustine's *On Christian Doctrine*, especially book one, 4–7, and book two, 1: "For a sign is a thing which of itself makes some other thing come to mind, besides the impression that it presents to the senses. So when we see a footprint we think of the animal whose footprint it is that passed by; when we see smoke we realize that there is fire beneath it…" Augustine of Hippo. *On Christian Teaching*. Trans. R.P.H. Green. Oxford University Press: New York, 2008. p. 30.

[331] See Luther, "Concerning the Letter and the Spirit," in *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, p. 68. The full passage reads: "If he [Emser] could at least show where the Holy Spirit teaches too little and where Scripture needs the additions of men, there would be some appearance of reason […] I say this only so that you, dear [Emser], may see that if sheer murderous noise and raging amplification could strengthen your cause, I could strengthen my cause even more with them. [But] my cause does not need [human amplifications]. It is well grounded in Scripture. Yours certainly does, because it is built upon human dreams and upon the chamber of [the Pope's] heart."

[332] Herder advances a similar kind of historicism in his sermon "Göttlichkeit und Gebrauch der Bibel" (1768), in which he suggests that God had to reveal his will in a way that would allow specific cultures

My analysis of Luther's polemics against Müntzer, Erasmus, and Emser serves as the basis for discussing how Lessing confronts the Lutheran tradition, rather than carrying it further as Heine suggested. I propose that he defies the Lutheran doctrine of *sola scriptura* as soon as he announces that "Der buchstabe ist nicht der Geist; und die Bibel ist nicht die Religion. Folglich sind Einwürfe gegen den Buchstaben, und gegen die Bibel, nicht eben auch Einwürfe gegen den Geist und gegen Religion"[333] [The letter is not the spirit, and the bible is not religion. Objections to the letter and the bible need not also be objections to the spirit and to religion]. The significance of this claim cannot be overstated. The implication is that faith no longer revolves around the letter of religion, but rather its spirit. Expressed more boldly, Lessing initiates a Copernican turn in (Protestant) religious consciousness; a turn that promises to multiply (rather than limit) the possibilities for religious experience by allowing the letter to be reshaped by criticism. To break the halo surrounding the letter of religion was a clear provocation that did not go unnoticed by the Protestant community, as some of the most bitter polemics of the fragment controversy directly challenged this claim. Yet the effects of Lessing's argument went well beyond the theological community

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and ages to understand Him: "Wenn Gott sich also für Menschen offenbarte: wie anders, als in der Sprache und Denkart des Volkes, des Erdstrichs, des Jahrhunderts, des Zeitalters, zu dem seine Stimme geschah. Nun ists eine ausgemachte Sache, daß die Denkart, und die Art des Ausdruckes allen Völkern der Erde nicht gleich ist, und noch weniger in allen Zeitaltern dieselbe bleibt. Der Morgenländer […] hat eine ganze andre Welt um sich: einen Schatz von ganz andern Begriffen in seiner Seele gesammelt, und durch die Erziehung seines Erdstrichs eine ganz andere Richtung Wendung Ton Gestalt des Geistes bekommen, als der Abend- und Nordländer" (p. 29) [When God first revealed himself to mankind, how else than in the language and style of thinking of the people, the part of the world, the century, the age, to which his voice was addressed. Now it is a foregone conclusion that the mode of thinking, and the mode of expression is not the same in all the peoples of the earth, and still less is it the same in all ages. The Oriental […] has an entirely different world around him: a treasure of entirely different concepts has collected in his soul and through the upbringing in his part of the world he has acquired a very different tendency, orientation, tone, form of spirit to that of the Occidental and Northerner]. Herder, Johann, *Werke in zehn Bänden: Theologische Schriften*, Band 9, hrsg. von Christoph Bultmann und Thomas Zippert, Frankfurt am Main: Deutsche Klassiker Verlag, 1994. Translation mine.

[333] See Lessing, *Fragmentenstreit I*, p. 312.

insofar as it invited the secular community to also participate in reshaping the letter of religion. Artists and writers who observed the polemics of the controversy felt more authorized to work with material considered to be sacred, and Lessing's arguments were instrumental in facilitating the emergence of Kunstreligion, which Romantic writers like Novalis and Schleiermacher developed in their religious writings. If Klopstock had access to Lessing's insight before writing his *Heilige Poesie*, then there would have been no need to express a duty to "follow in the footsteps of scripture";[334] instead he could have been more honest and argued that his poetics were an approximation of the spirit of religion and that his adaptations were intended to speak to the spiritual needs of the present.

I will discuss Lessing's theology of spirit in the following section, but for now it is important to see how his call for the free and open criticism of the letter helped breathe new life into modern faith, which had been choking on the bad air of dogmatic theology ever since the Reformation invested absolute authority in the letter of religion. This is not to say, however, that there was a ban on, or even a dearth of biblical criticism at the time. Nothing could be further from the reality of eighteenth-century Germany, which chronicles a thriving industry of biblical scholarship, criticism, and translation.[335] Yet, who had the authority to object, and the kinds of objections that were approved by a relatively small circle of gatekeepers, remained a problem well

[334] See my chapter one, section 3, "Fabricating Thomas."
[335] A good source on this is Jonathan Sheehan's recent book *The Enlightenment Bible: Translation, Scholarship, Culture*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005. Of course, after the French Revolution and the death of Frederick the Great, Prussia experienced a new wave of censorship laws used to impede the advancement of revolutionary ideas, the Wöllner Edict of 1791 being the most notorious. Wöllner specifically targeted secular publications like Friedrich Nicolai's *Allgemeine Deutsche Bibliothek* (1765–1806), which was arguably one of the most important instruments for disseminating "enlightenment" by offering a public platform for theologians, aestheticians, poets, and critics to exchange their ideas.

into the nineteenth century. From the standpoint of Lessing's Bildung project, religious intolerance only served to insulate religious subjects from *actual* problems that, if not addressed, could threaten their faith.[336] For Lessing, objections to the bible should be taken seriously even if they were uttered from the mouths of deists, atheists, and freethinkers. This distinguishes him from Klopstock, who in his *Heilige Poesie* essay expressed intolerant views by suggesting that freethinkers did not have the capacity to fully understand Christianity—or his own religious poetry for that matter: "Der Freigeist, und der Christ, der seine Religion nur halb versteht, sehn da nur einen großen Schauplatz von Trümmern, wo der tiefsinnige Christ einen majestätischen Tempel sieht"[337] [The free spirit, and the Christian who only half understands his religion, sees in scripture only a great scene of rubble, where the profound Christian sees a majestic temple]. Lessing, by contrast, worked to ensure that *any* form of biblical criticism was given the opportunity to actualize its most obvious end: cultivating more advanced knowledge of religion.

Lessing's *Nathan* (especially its ring parable) is consistently cited as evidence of his broader political commitment to address the harmful effects of religious intolerance, which he personally experienced after being censored in 1778.[338] To get a more direct sense of his fight against religious intolerance–and the people who suffered from it–one can explore his often overlooked collection of *Rettungen* essays in which he works to redeem the reputations of allegedly "heretical" authors who were slandered, censored, and forgotten as a result of theological

[336] Here I have in mind the question that Lessing posed in his *Beweis* essay: "Was bindet mich denn dazu?" [what, then, binds me to [my faith]?]. To develop a cataphatic answer to this question was essential for Lessing to overcome Reimarus' skeptical claims.
[337] Friedrich Gottlieb Klopstock, "Von der heiligen Poesie," in *Klopstocks Sämmtliche Werke*, vol. 10 Leipzig: Göschen, 1854–55, pp. 237–38.
[338] Lessing was censored by the Duke of Braunschweig at the request of Goeze.

prejudice.[339] For instance, in his *Rettung des Hier. Cardano*, Lessing reevaluated the writings of Girolamo Cardano (1501–1576), a sixteenth-century Italian Renaissance mathematician, physician, and theologian, who was targeted by the Inquisition for his book *De Subtilitate* (1552). In the work, Cardano created dialogues in which representatives from major world religions (Christianity, Judaism, Islam, and Paganism) disputed the different proofs that were used to legitimize their respective faith traditions and, much to the chagrin of Cardano's biased audience, Christianity did not emerge as the one and only true religion. This led Julius Caesar Scaliger (1484–1558) to accuse Cardano of atheism in his *Exotericarum exercitationum liber XV, de Subtilitate, ad Hieronymus Cardanum* (1557). Scaligar's attack on Cardano spread like brush fire and his reputation did not start to recover until Pierre Bayle defused the charge of atheism in his *Dictionnaire Historique et Critique* (1697). In his *Rettungen des Cardanus*, Lessing claims to only be supplementing what Bayle began: "Man wird es als einen guten Zusatz zu dem Artikel ansehen können, welchen Bayle, in seinem kritischen Wörterbuche, von diesem Gelehrten gemacht hat[340]" [One will be able to view it as a good addition to the article that Bayle, in his critical dictionary, wrote about this scholar]. However, Lessing's apology does much more than that. It pinpoints three theological reasons why Cardano's work was considered heretical by his peers: 1) it argued against the immortality of the soul, 2) it used astrology to construct a horoscope for Christ's life, and 3) it did not identify Christianity as the one true religion. The last reason is the one that Lessing is most concerned about because it was the one that Scaligar and subsequent generations of theologians

[339] See Lessing's *Rettung des Hier. Cardano*, *Rettung des inepti religiosi*, *Rettung des Cochläus aber nur in der Kleinigkeiten*, *Rettung des Lemnius*; and I would also count his better-known defense of pietism, *Gedanken über die Herrnhuter*, among these. For a study on the Cardano essay, see: Moore, Evelyn K., *The Passions of Rhetoric: Lessing's Theory of Argument and the German Enlightenment*, Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1993, pp 19–38.

[340] Lessing, *Werke in drei Bänden*, München: Deutsche Taschenbuch Verlag, 2003, Band III, p. 286. Translation mine.

used as the basis for describing Cardano as an atheist. Lessing translated this key section of Cardano's work into German and afterwards wrote: "Warum verdammt man eigentlich diese Stelle? Ist die Vergleichung der verschiednen Religionen, an und vor sich selbst, strafbar; oder ist es nur die Art, mit welcher sie Cardan unternommen hat? […] Was ist nötiger, als sich von seinem Glauben zu überzeugen, und was ist unmöglicher als Überzeugung, ohne vorhergegangene Prüfung[341]?" [Why does one actually condemn this? Is a comparison of the various religions in and of itself punishable? Or is it just the manner in which Cardano went about his comparison? […] What is more necessary than to be convinced of one's faith and what is more impossible than conviction without first examining that faith?]. Whether it was Cardano or even Lessing himself, being able to freely test the strength of one's religious convictions was non-negotiable, and it was Lessing's insistence that this testing be conducted in the court of public opinion that drove much of the controversy with respect to the Reimarus fragments.[342]

To mitigate the anticipated backlash from the public, Lessing initially released a small, seemingly innocuous portion of Reimarus' fragments (*Von der Duldung der Deisten/On Tolerating Deists*) that called on religious institutions to stop persecuting theologians, who wanted to incorporate principles of rationalism into their study of religion. Gradually he released additional fragments that expressed more radical views against foundational doctrines of Christianity.[343] With respect to Lessing's call for greater tolerance, it is especially illuminating to think through the first lines of his *Gegensätze* [counter-propositions], which accompanied the more offensive fragments. In these lines Lessing provides his rationale for publishing:

[341] Ibid., 293. Translation mine.
[342] See my section III of this chapter.
[343] See my chapter 2, section I.

> Wer von meinen Lesern mir sie [die Fragmenten] aber lieber ganz geschenkt hätte, der ist sicherlich *furchtsamer*, als *unterrichtet*. Er kann ein sehr *frommer* Christ sein, aber ein sehr *aufgeklärter* ist er gewiß nicht. Er kann es mit seiner Religion herzlich gut *meinen*: nur müßte er ihr auch mehr *zutrauen.*[344]
>
> [But any one of my readers who would rather I had kept them [the fragments] to myself is surely more faint-hearted than well informed. He may be a very pious Christian, but he is certainly not a very enlightened one. He may genuinely mean well by his religion, but he ought also to have more faith in it.]

To turn a pious, well-intentioned blind eye to the fragments is to give up on the prospect that Christianity and enlightenment are at all compatible. This was, after all, Reimarus' expressed conclusion. The passage also suggests that religious intolerance sustains forms of ignorance that transform piety into prejudice. Lessing's call for the public to "have more faith in religion" is less insipid than it may appear. Taken in context, he specifically refers to feeling confident in religion's ability to withstand even the most devastating critiques against its letter. As I have already described, for Lessing, the purpose of the bible is not to construct a philosophical system, but to provide ethical wisdom that helps religious subjects realize their own salvation. Henry Alison aptly described Lessing's *Gedanken über die Herrnhuter* [Thoughts about the Moravians] as "the clearest expression of Lessing's practical stance toward religion."[345] In this text, Lessing writes: "Der Mensch ward zum Tun und nicht zum Vernünfteln erschaffen […] Was hilft es, recht zu glauben, wenn man unrecht lebt?"[346] [Man was created for action and not for speculation […] What help is it to believe properly, if one cannot live properly?]. In other words, the letter is only a vehicle that helps religious subjects learn "how to live properly," and no matter how much

[344] Lessing, E.G. *Werke und Briefe: Zur Geschichte und Literatur: Band 8*, hrsg. von Arno Schilson, Frankfurt am Main: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1989, p. 312.
[345] See: Allison, Henry, *Lessing and the Enlightenment: His Philosophy of Religion and its Relation to Eighteenth-Century Thought*, Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1966.
[346] See Lessing's *Gedanken über die Herrnhuter*, p. 272–77. Translation mine.

Reimarus rages against the inadequacies of the letter, his criticism remains fixed on the "Aussenwerk" [external structures] of religion. In this sense, Reimarus' criticism fails to penetrate the spirit of religion as he cannot provide a moral argument for why Christians should disregard the ethical wisdom scattered across the various books of religion.

Even though orthodox theology was largely responsible for silencing critical voices of opposition by fomenting religious intolerance and promoting the absolute authority of the letter of religion, Lessing still valued its ability to maintain a positive stance towards the letter. The failure of neology and deism to define itself positively (rather than negatively) in relation to the biblical tradition provided the basis for Lessing's critique against modern theology.[347] His subtle praise of orthodoxy, by contrast, was owing to the fact that it neither rejected (deism) nor mediated (neology) revealed knowledge, but wholly accepted it.[348] For Lessing, this is what modern theology lacked and, unlike his contemporaries, he turned to the spirit of religion to develop a cataphatic theology that could celebrate the continued relevance of the biblical tradition. Lessing announced his desire for a positive faith at the very start of the fragment controversy by suggesting that Christianity could easily absorb the damage caused by Reimarus' arguments. He writes:

> Aber was gehen dem Christen dieses Mannes Hypothesen, und Erklärungen und Beweise an? Ihm ist es doch einmal da, das Christentum, welches er so wahr, in welchem er sich so selig *fühlet*.—Wenn der Paralyticus die wohltätigen Schläge des Elektrischen Funkens *erfähret*: was kümmert es ihn, ob Nollet, oder ob Franklin, oder ob keiner von beiden Recht hat?[349]
>
> [What does this man's hypotheses, explanations, and proofs matter to the Christian? For him, Christianity is simply *there*, that same Christianity which he *feels* is so true and in which he *feels* himself so blessed.—When the paralyzed patient

[347] For a study on Lessing's relationship to cataphatic theology, see Dilthey, Wilhelm, *Das Erlebnis und die Dichtung: Lessing, Goethe, Novalis, Hölderlin*, durchgesehene aufl., Leipzig: Reclam, 1991.
[348] See Lessing's letter to his brother in my chapter 2, section III.
[349] See Lessing, *Gegensätze des Herausgebers*.

> *experiences* the salutary shock of the electric spark, what does he care whether Nollet, or Franklin, or neither of the two is right?]

In other words, the "hypotheses, explanations, and proofs" contained in Reimarus' fragments do nothing to undermine the fact that Christians continue to take moral recourse in their religion to navigate everyday experiences. For modern theologians like Reimarus, faith becomes detached from any conception of a living religion and is evaluated solely according to the standards set by philology and natural science.

Yet, if there was one advantage that modern theology brought to the table, it was that its historical-critical approach to scripture drove a wedge between the present moment and the historical remoteness of revealed truths. Rather than seeing this gap as a source of irreconcilable alienation, Lessing saw it as an opportunity to reshape modernity's relationship to the biblical tradition. His theology of spirit does not demand a "hairsplitting" knowledge of the letter, but it does require a sense of history that is able to grasp the differences between the past and the present. In other words, the spirit of religion becomes a site of interpretation, whereby the significance of these differences must be confronted. By insisting that religious subjects interpret the spirit of religion by reflecting on the history of the Church, the letter of religion suddenly becomes dialogical and no longer enjoys absolute authority.

V. From the Page to the Heart: Lessing's Theology of Spirit

> What good does it do me to know that some obscure "king" of long ago was hung on a double wood? […] For if you consider only the insignificance of the thing in itself, it will seem to you unworthy of God. But "if you look at the grandeur of the mystery" that is contained in it, then you will be edified. [Spiritual] exegesis is not at all a negation of the literal which has often been claimed. It is, on the contrary, although in an

indirect way, its justification.[350]

—Henri de Lubac, History and Spirit: The Understanding of Scripture according to Origen.

Nearly twenty years before the fragment controversy erupted, Lessing aired literary grievances to one of his most trusted friends. On December 18, 1756 Lessing wrote Mendelssohn: "Ich bin überzeugt, daß meine Worte oft meinem Sinne Schaden thun, daß ich mich nicht selten zu unbestimmt oder zu nachlässig ausdrücke. Versuchen Sie es also, liebster Freund, sich durch Ihr eignen Nachdenken in den Geist meines Systems zu versetzen. Und vielleicht finden Sie es weit besser, als ich es vorstellen kann"[351] [I am convinced that my words often do harm to the sense I wish to communicate. It is often the case that my expressions are too uncertain, too careless. So, my dear friend, try to place yourself into the spirit of my system by means of your own reflection and perhaps you will be able to express the meaning far better than I can imagine]. Lessing's insight—that language fails to adequately preserve the full significance of our ideas—might initially sound like a banal variation of Platonic dualism. Yet the antagonism between "Wort" and "Sinn" establishes a red thread running throughout Lessing's work which I have been pursuing throughout this chapter. Curiously, that which is here described in terms of the dramatist's "Schaden" (i.e. the inadequacy of language) actually acquires value when taken from other standpoints within Lessing's work. As I noted in his aesthetic writings, for instance, it is precisely the lack of a completed "Sinn" [sense] that leaves room for the imagination to freely combine a manifold of parts into a lively presentation of the whole.[352] Therefore, the "Schaden" [defect] that

[350] Lubac, Henri De, *History and Spirit: The Understanding of Scripture According to Origen*, trans. Anne Englund Nash, San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2007.
[351] Briefe an Mendelssohn, 18 December 1756, in *Briefwechsel über das Trauerspiel*.
[352] See my chapter 2, section II, and Lessing's *Laokoon* (especially his chapters III and VI).

Lessing laments evaporates into the larger spirit of his system once it becomes evident that the inadequacy of language provides Mendelssohn with the necessary conditions for further enquiry—to think for himself [Selbstdenken] and try his luck at finding a "far better" representation of Lessing's elusive "Sinn."[353]

Of course, the disjunction between "Worte" and "Sinne" is phrased differently across Lessing's oeuvre and, consequently, acquires distinct theological, philosophical, ethical, or aesthetic significance depending on the environment in which it emerges.[354] As I have tried to show, in Lessing's theological writings, the "Worte/Sinne" distinction is primarily conjugated as a difference between the "Buchstabe" and the "Geist" of Christianity. In several manuscripts from his religious writings, Lessing pursues a logic similar to that expressed both in his letter to Mendelssohn and in his *Laokoon* treatise. More generally, the letter to Mendelssohn captures Lessing's preference for an open epistemology, that is, an epistemology which holds provisional knowledge in better standing than knowledge subjugated to philosophical closure or religious prejudice. This is best expressed through one of the most cited passages of Lessing's theological writings, in which he distinguishes between absolute truth and the search for truth:

> Wenn Gott in seiner Rechten alle Wahrheit, und in seiner Linken den einzigen immer regen Trieb nach Wahrheit, obschon mit dem Zusatze, mich immer und ewig zu irren, verschlossen hielte, und spräche zu mir: wähle! Ich fiele ihm mit Demut

[353] For a work that develops the idea of the public (something I do not fully treat here) as a necessary condition for Lessing's "Selbstdenken," see Hannah Arendt's introduction to *Men in Dark Times*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973.

[354] For a systematic study of Lessing's distinction between the "Wort" and "Sinn" across his published writings, see Bohnen, Klaus, *Geist und Buchstabe: Zum Prinzip des kritischen Verfahrens in Lessings literaräesthetischen und theologischen Schriften*, Köln: Böhlau Verlag, 1974. Also, David Wellbery deduces a "global model of signification" from Lessing's *Laokoon* in his book *Laocoon: Semiotics and Aesthetics in the Age of Reason*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984.

> in seine Linke, und sagte: Vater gib! Die reine Wahrheit ist ja doch nur für dich allein![355]
>
> [If God held fast in his right hand the whole of truth and in his left hand only the ever-active quest for truth, albeit with the provision that I should constantly and eternally err, and said to me: 'choose!' I would humbly fall upon his left hand and say: 'Father, give!' For pure truth is for you alone!]

Echoing the late medieval theology of Nicholas of Cusa,[356] Lessing suggests that without error there would be no horizon for improvement and, consequently, nothing to strive after; the hope of the "pregnant moment" dashed by absolute knowing. In other words, taking from the right hand of God would end the labor of Bildung by placing God and humanity on an equal footing.

My guiding argument in this section is that Lessing's conception of spirit acquires a historical dimension by placing religious truth on a developmental continuum, which effectively secures a future for religion. By reposturing modern faith towards the spirit of religion rather than its letter, Lessing attempts to show that revealed knowledge is not entirely revealed, that the miracles and prophecies of the remote past are not completely fulfilled and that human culture and education are tasked with advancing the work of revelation, whose primary objective is the improvement of humanity. In this sense, Lessing does not abandon or undermine revelation (as his critics feared); rather, he views revelation as perpetually unfolding, whereby each generation is responsible for creating new interpretations of scripture and biblical history (i.e. the development,

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[355] Lessing, *Eine Duplik*. These words were directed against Johann Heinrich Ress, an orthodox Lutheran who subscribed to the inerrancy theory of scripture and, therefore, denied Reimarus' claim that the four gospel narratives contained contradicting witness testimony.

[356] See Cusanus, Nicholas, *Of Learned Ignorance*, Eugene, Or.: Wipf & Stock, 2007, chapter 3, "Absolute Truth is Beyond our Grasp": "It is clear, therefore, that all we know of the truth is that the absolute truth, such as it is, is beyond our reach. The truth, which can be neither more nor less than it is, is the most absolute necessity, while, in contrast with it, our intellect is possibility. Therefore, the quiddity of things, which is ontological truth, is unattainable in its entirety; and though it has been the objective of all philosophers, by none has it been found as it really is. The more profoundly we learn this lesson of ignorance, the closer we draw to the truth itself" (p. 12).

transmission, and canonization of religious doctrines and practices) in order to access an ethos that transcends historical contingencies. Most important for our context is the fact that Lessing does not exclude literature from participating in this interpretive process. In fact, in his *Anti-Goeze* 8, Lessing defends the integrity of his "dramatic style" ["Theaterlogik"] of theologizing: "Ich suche allerdings, durch die Phantasie mit, auf den Verstand meiner Leser zu wirken. Ich halte es nicht allein für nützlich, sondern auch für notwendig, Gründe in Bilder zu kleiden; und alle die Nebenbegriffe, welche die einen oder die andern erwecken, durch Anspielungen zu bezeichnen"[357] [Above all, I try to act on the understanding of my readers with the help of imagination. I consider it to be not only be useful, but also necessary, to dress concepts [Gründe] in images; and to describe by means of allusions all the secondary concepts inspired by the concepts or the images]. Excluding his theological drama *Nathan der Weise* (1779), however, statements like this remain relatively scarce in Lessing's theological writings, and after reading his *Erziehung des Menschengeschlechts* it becomes clear that all the imaginative labor is understood more as scaffolding that needs to be kicked away once human reason reaches a certain stage of maturity. More will be said about this paradox in the following chapter on Novalis. To support the claims of this section, however, I will work through Lessing's *Über den Beweis des Geistes und der Kraft*, which clarifies the epistemic status of history in theological discourse and the *Erziehung des Menschengeschlechts*, which performs what I am calling Lessing's theology of spirit by presenting an interpretation of history that shows revealed knowledge to play a vital role in the progress humanity.

[357] Lessing, Gotthold Ephraim, *Werke in drei Bänden*, München: Deutsche Taschenbuch Verlag, 2003, p. 523. Translation mine.

Before turning to these texts, however, it should be noted that Lessing's distinction between the letter and the spirit of religion is by no means an original insight within the history of Christian thought. The distinction has been applied in vastly different contexts and has itself been subject to historical transformations. It was already used in the Epistles of Paul to declare mankind competent ministers of a new covenant with God;[358] it was taken up again by Irenaeus of Lyons in the second century to discredit gnostic interpretations of scripture;[359] and later still by Spinoza in the seventeenth century to prevent a corrupt clergy from further legitimizing superstitious beliefs and practices.[360] However, Lessing's reoccupation of the distinction is unique in that he directs it towards solving a specific problem within enlightenment theology, namely, its inclination to fetishize the Buchstabe, which Lessing called "Bibliolatrie."[361] What does this mean? Again, it means accepting only that part of scripture standing in the "natural light of reason"; it means paraphrasing the Word of God to appease popular morality; it means adopting Wolffian methods

[358] See 2 Corinthians, 3:1–3, "You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, known and read by everyone. You show that you are a letter from Christ, the result of our ministry, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts."
[359] See Irenaeus, *On Heresies*, section 4.2: "Many foreign peoples believe in Christ and […] possess salvation, written by the Spirit in their hearts without paper or ink." In Grant, Robert M. *Irenaeus of Lyons*. Routledge, 1997, p. 96.
[360] See Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, trans. Michael Silverthorne and Jonathan Israel, ed. Jonathan Israel, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007, Chapter 13: "I fear that [my adversaries] are too anxious to be pious, and that they are in danger of turning religion into superstition, and worshipping paper and ink in place of God's Word."
[361] In his posthumously published *Theologische Nachlass* (1784), Lessing comes close to expressing this view himself in his essay *Bibliolatrie*, which was intended to be worked into his collection of writings titled *Sogennante Briefe an verschiedene Gottesgelehrte* though he never completely finished it before his death. In the essay, Lessing writes: "Ich verstehe unter *Bibliolatrie* diejenige Verehrung, welche man für die Bibel und besonders für die Bücher des N. Testaments zu verschiedenen Zeiten verschiedentlich gefordert hat" [By Bibliolatry I understand the veneration which has been demanded at various times for the Bible, and especially for the books of the New Testament]. Lessing, Gotthold Ephraim. *Werke und Briefe: In Zwölf Bänden*. Band 10. Hrsg. Von Arno Schilson und Axel Schmitt. Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1985. p. 165. Translation mine.

to fortify theological doctrines against external criticism. In short, it means to bind oneself to the logos of scripture as though it were the primary object of faith instead of the underlying ethos that gave rise to scripture in the first place,[362] a situation that, as discussed in the previous section, developed out of Luther's doctrine of *sola scriptura*. The *Beweis* essay demonstrates that Lessing paid much greater attention to the historical context(s) of the biblical tradition (i.e. its transmission from the Early Church to the eighteenth century) than many of his contemporaries. Above all, it shows that he was more interested in the potential effects of scripture than the supposed "truth" of its origins, which ultimately made him less bound to the prevailing philological paradigms of his day.

As I argued in the previous section, Lessing's conception of spirit breathed new life into the letter/spirit distinction by reversing the hierarchy that Luther helped to establish. As a result, Lessing reshaped the discourse on "Geist," which continued to preoccupy many of his peers and successors, who developed the aesthetic underpinnings of his theology.[363] For instance, in the 1780s and 1790s Kant made room for the aesthetic in his religious thought, if one considers the linchpins of his categorical imperative and moral proof of God's existence to turn on their aesthetic, "as if" statements; that is, to think and act *as if* there was a God and *as if* our guiding maxims were at the same time universal maxims. Fichte, for his part, closely followed Lessing by wedding an

[362] Kant also develops this idea in his *Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten* (1785) and in his *Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der bloßen Vernunft* (1793). In the latter he argues that taking the letter for the spirit is a "perversion of the heart that reverses the ethical order." See part I, section II (6:30f). According to Kant, "a perversion of the heart" is the result of a "depraved moral disposition," whereby a person acts virtuously merely because the letter of the moral law commands it. By contrast, if a person acts virtuously because the spirit of the law (i.e. the categorical imperative) incentivizes him to do so, then his actions acquire moral worth.

[363] See my chapter 2, section II.

aesthetic sense of spirit to Bildung. According to Fichte, spirit is defined as the productive imagination's "Vermögen Gefühle zum Bewußtseyn zu erheben"[364] [capacity to raise feelings to consciousness], which involves translating the immanent, self-activity of the "I" into mutually serviceable representations that inspire others to develop new and original representations of their own.[365] In other words, spirit inspires spirit, according to Fichte's definition, and when this capacity is ascribed to the bible itself, a dialogical relation between scripture and an individual reader, community, or epoch becomes possible. Hegel also made use of Lessing's concept of spirit, secularizing it and then applying it to his history of art, in which the tripartite logical structure of Lessing's *Erziehung* finds expression in the development of classical, symbolic, and romantic art forms.[366] Finally, Lessing's conception of spirit—as a constitutive feature of scripture that constantly needs to be reinterpreted—represents an early step towards Romantic irony, which Friedrich Schlegel described as being "instinctive" for Lessing.[367] This instinct continues to be

[364] Fichte, Johann Gottlieb, *Von den Pflichten der Gelehrten: Jenaer Vorlesungen 1794/95*, hrsg. von Reinhard Lauth, Hans Jacob, Peter K. Schneider, Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1971, p. 59.
[365] See Fichte, *Über den Unterschied des Geistes, und des Buchstabens in der Philosophie*. Here Fichte writes, "[...] der Geist überhaupt, oder die productive Einbildungskraft läßt sich demnach beschreiben als ein *Vermögen Gefühle zum Bewußtseyn zu erheben* [...] er [Der geistvolle] muß, um mit andern in Wechselwirkung treten zu können, eine Erscheinung, die seine geistige Idee ausdrückt, insoweit der Körper den Geist ausdrücken kann, außer sich hervorbringen; er tut das, heißt es, wenn gesagt wird, er stellt den Geist im Körper dar" [spirit as such, or productive imagination, may be described as a *capacity for raising feelings to consciousness* […] All he [a person with spirit] wanted to do was to enter into reciprocal interaction with another person. By means of his bodily presentation he only wished to provide the other person with an occasion for developing through his own efforts those spiritual ideas which dwell within him." Fichte, Johann Gottlieb. *Von den Pflichten Der Gelehrten: Jenaer Vorlesungen 1794/95.* Meiner, 1971, pp. 59-62. Translation by *Daniel Breazeale.* See. Fichte, Johann Gottlieb, 1762-1814. *Fichte, Early Philosophical Writings*. Cornell University Press, 1988.
[366] Sections 85–90 of Lessing's *Erziehung* were especially important to the logical structures of Hegel's thought. In these sections Lessing develops the idea of the "three ages of the world," in which the New Testament supersedes the Old Testament, and an even newer "eternal covenant" is poised to supersede the New Testament.
[367] In his *Kritische Fragmente* (no.108), Schlegel writes: "Sie [Irony] enthält und erregt ein Gefühl von dem unauflöslichen Widerstreit des Unbedingten und des Bedingten, der Unmöglichkeit und

present even in more recent scholarship like that of Gianni Vattimo, who affirms the need for a dialogical relationship with the Word of God by claiming that "salvation takes place through interpretation."[368] However, to fully flesh out the skeleton of this forward-looking intellectual history would exceed my purpose, though it is worth mentioning if only to show that the significance of Lessing's concept of spirit extends well beyond the immediate concerns of the fragment controversy.

Lessing's *Beweis* essay is a short polemic addressed to the orthodox Lutheran theologian Johann Daniel Schumann, who, in his treatise *Über die Evidenz der Beweise für die Wahrheit der Christlichen Religion* (1778), rejected the controversial claim of Reimarus' second fragment that holds "it is not possible to believe in revelation on rational grounds."[369] Adhering to Siegmund Baumgarten's methodology and completely ignoring the arguments that Lessing put forward in his *Gegensätze*, Schumann built an elaborate "historical proof" using witness testimony in the New Testament to demonstrate that Christianity did in fact rest on sound truth.[370] To begin his argument, Schumann cited Origen's *Contra Celsum* (248 CE), an apologetic treatise written by a Church Father deemed heretical by the Second Council of Constantiople in 553. In this work, Origen

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Notwendigkeit einer vollständigen Mitteilung. […] Lessings Ironie ist Instinkt" [Irony contains and arouses a feeling of indissoluble antagonism between the absolute and the relative, between the impossibility and the necessity of complete communication […] For Lessing, irony is instinct]. In Schlegel, Friedrich von, *Ausgewählte Werke: 1772-1829*. Dom-Verlag, 1922, p. 207. Modified translation mine.

[368] Vattimo, Gianni, *Belief*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999, p. 60. The full passage reads: "From the perspective of religious experience, the actuality of hermeneutics, which with good reason regards itself as *the* philosophy of modernity, means that for us, more than in past epochs, salvation takes place through interpretation."

[369] See Reimarus' zweite Fragment, titled "Unmöglichkeit einer Offenbarung, die alle Menschen auf eine gegründete Art Glauben könnten."

[370] See especially Schumann's "Historische Gewißheit der neutestamentlichen Wunderwerke, dargetan aus dem Zeugnis aller Christen, die zur Zeit Jesu und der Apostel, aus dem Zeugnis der frühesten Ketzer, aus dem Zeugnis der Apostel. Authenticität dieses Zeugnisses."

attempted to elevate the status of Christian proof (i.e. revealed truth) for an audience accustomed to Greek methods of proof (i.e. dialectics). Origen's opponent, Celsus, argued that Christians must "use sundry methods of persuasion, and invent a number of terrifying incentives" to convert their followers and that "only a blind faith can explain the hold that Jesus has on [the Christian's] imagination."[371] "Above all," Celsus objects, "they have concocted an absolutely offensive doctrine of everlasting punishments and rewards, exceeding anything the philosophers could have imagined."[372] Origen defends the doctrine of eternal reward and punishment, asserting that it provides a public service by helping people conduct themselves in accordance with virtue irrespective of whether or not this end is achieved through rational arguments.[373] However, Origen's apology is not limited to just the moral ends of Christianity; he also reflects on the effectiveness of the means, acknowledging, together with Celsus, that Greeks are perhaps better at judging *human* wisdom than Christians.[374] According to Origen, if Christians make use of Greek

[371] Celsus, *On the True Doctrine: A Discourse Against the Christians*, trans. R. Joseph Hoffman, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987, p. 61.
[372] Ibid., p. 70. Another major source of concern for Celsus was the Christians' seemingly hostile relationship to the law. On this he writes: "societies which are public are allowed by the laws, but secret societies are illegal." Celsus was especially opposed to the Christian doctrine of love insofar as it appeared to stand above law.
[373] Origen writes: "Moreover, concerning the multitude of believers who have renounced the great flood of evil in which they formerly used to wallow, we ask this question—is it better that those who believe without thought [i.e. blindly] should somehow have been made reformed characters and be helped by the belief that they are punished for sin and rewarded for good works, or that we should not allow them to be converted with simple faith until they might devote themselves to the study of rational arguments?" Origen, *Contra Celsum*, trans. Henry Chadwick, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953, 1:9, p. 12.
[374] Elsewhere, Origen stresses the distinction between human and divine wisdom. Whereas "worldly things" incentivizes human wisdom, divine wisdom concerns "eternal things." He writes: "Human teachings, for example, the art of grammar or rhetoric or even dialectic. Nothing should be taken from this teaching for sacrifice, that is, for what is to be thought about God. But it is commanded that clarity in speech and the glory of eloquence and the skill of argumentation be fittingly admitted to the ministry of God's word." See Balthasar, Hans Urs von, ed., *Origen: Spirit and Fire: A Thematic Anthology of His Writings*, trans. Robert J. Daly, Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2001, p. 207.

wisdom and methods to ground their doctrines, then Christianity might carry broader appeal. Origen hoped that by appealing to the disposition of the Greeks they might help to improve the presentation of its doctrines. Ideally this would lead to more conversions and allow him to assert the truth of Christianity by indexing its practical implementation among the Greeks: "A man coming to the gospel from Greek conceptions and training would not only judge that it was true, but would also *put it into practice and so prove it to be correct*; and he would complete what seemed to be lacking judged by the criterion of a Greek proof, thus establishing the truth of Christianity."[375]

Unlike Origen, Schumann's apology showed little interest in making concessions to his opponents. Rather, he viewed deists like Reimarus and literary figures like Lessing simply as external threats to the Lutheran Church. Schumann's allusion to Origen at the start of his treatise served to conflate the ancient quarrel with modern controversies that were caused by the fragments. In fact, Schumann explicitly reduced the significance of Reimarus' fragments to a mere renewal of ancient hostilities between secular and religious cultures: "The old complaint about the deficiency of evidence still drags on," Schumann lamented. "However much divine proof has been put into perspective, one still seeks to avoid it, and our more recent enemies of religion do so with even greater subtlety; the more knowledge of philosophy and literature they acquire, the more

[375] Origen, *Contra Celsum*, trans. Henry Chadwick, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953, 1:2, emphasis added. The passage is central for both Schumann and Lessing; it continues: "Moreover, we have to say this, that the gospel has a proof which is peculiar to itself, and which is more divine than a Greek proof based on dialectical argument. This more divine demonstration the apostle [Paul] calls a 'demonstration of the Spirit and of power'—of spirit because of the prophecies and especially those which refer to Christ, which are capable of convincing anyone who reads them; of power because of the prodigious miracles which may be proved to have happened by this argument among many others, that traces of them still remain among those who live according to the will of the Logos" (p. 8).

excuses they find to avoid it."[376] Schumann misappropriated Origen's apologetic writings to suggest that the Early Church Father had already solved the problem of evidence for Christianity and that the unnamed author of the fragments should just go back and read Origen to restore his faith.[377] Yet this gesture ignores the vast and complex history separating the Early Church from the Protestant Church of the eighteenth century. In my view, a major difference between Origen and Schumann is that the former actually engaged with his conversation partner and showed an interest in using the methods of his adversary to "complete what seems to be lacking" in Christian proofs. There is, in other words, a sense of tolerance that permeates Origen's apology.[378] Schumann, by contrast, viewed Lessing and Reimarus as enemies that either needed to be censored, or beaten into submission by reasserting historical "facts," which did little to resolve the specific contradictions discussed in the fragments.[379]

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[376] "Die alte Klage über die Mangelhaftigkeit des Beweises dauert noch fort. So sehr auch jener göttliche Beweis nachher ins licht gesetzt worden, sucht man doch demselben auszuweichen, und die neueren Religionsfeinde tun das mit desto größerer Spitzfindigkeit, je mehr sie Kenntnis der Philosophie und Literatur in den Stand setzt, scheinbare Ausflüchte zu finden finden." Schumann, Johann Daniel, *Über die Evidenz der Beweise für die Wahrheit der Christlichen Religion*, in Lessing, E.G. *Werke und Briefe: Zur Geschichte und Literatur: Band 8*, hrsg. von Arno Schilson, Frankfurt am Main: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1989, p. 358.

[377] In some ways, the preface of *Contra Celsum* is itself complicit in this reading. Here Origen describes his target audience as "those of weak faith" and he refers them back to Paul to strengthen their resolve. He writes: "This book is not written at all for true Christians, but either for those entirely without experience of faith in Christ, or for those whom the apostle [Paul] calls, 'weak in faith'; for he says this: 'Him that is weak in faith receive ye' [Romans, 14:1]." Origen, *Contra Celsum*, trans. Henry Chadwick, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953, 1:6, p. 6.

[378] Origen's writings on "Human Wisdom and Divine Wisdom" offer some of the clearest expressions of his tolerance: "If we sometimes come across something which has been said wisely by the pagans, we should not immediately spurn what was said just because of the author's name; nor is it right for us, because we observe God's law, to spurn the words of prudent people. We should do as the Apostle says: 'Test everything; hold fast what is good' (1 Thess 5:21)." In Balthasar, Hans Urs von, ed., *Origen: Spirit and Fire: A Thematic Anthology of His Writings*, trans. Robert J. Daly, Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2001, p. 207.

[379] See my chapter 2, section I for a gloss on these specific contradictions.

Lessing was so unsettled by Schumann's reading of Origen that he changed the entire tone of his theological writings to polemics. In fact, he began his *Beweis* essay by likening Schumann to Erysichtthon, a character in Ovid's *Metamorphosis* who was cursed by the goddess of agriculture (Ceres) for desecrating a sacred forest. As punishment Erysichtthon experienced a devastating famine that drove him to eat anything he could get his hands on—even selling his daughter for food. In a final act of absurd desperation, Erysichtthon tried to satisfy his hunger by eating the air and eventually his own limbs.[380] "Ich hungere nach Überzeugung so sehr," Lessing wrote, "daß ich, wie Erischton, alles verschlinge, was einem Nahrungsmittel nur ähnlich sieht"[381] [I hunger so greatly for conviction that, like Erysichtthon, I devour anything that looks remotely like food]. Even though the "ich" seems to project Lessing into the figure of Erysichton, it is far more likely that he conjured up this myth to satirize theologians like Schumann, who relied on historical evidence to nourish their faith in Christianity. As far as Lessing was concerned, Schumann—and others like him—would do anything to prove that the truths of Christianity were necessary and universal. However, as the main argument of Lessing's *Beweis* essay emphatically states, "*zufällige Geschichtswahrheiten können der Beweis von notwendigen Vernunftswahrheiten nie warden*"[382] [it is not possible to derive necessary or absolute claims from historically contingent ones], and any effort to distort this amounts to a deception—like convincing oneself that eating the air could satisfy one's hunger.

[380] See Ovid's *Metamorphosis*, Book VII, lines 725–884.
[381] Lessing, *Werke und Briefe: Zur Geschichte und Literatur*, Band 8, hrsg. von Arno Schilson, Frankfurt am Main: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1989, p. 439.
[382] The exact quote reads: "zufällige Geschichtswahrheiten können der Beweis von notwendigen Vernunftswahrheiten nie werden" [contingent truths of history can never become the proof of necessary truths of reason]. Ibid., p. 441.

Lessing's *Beweis* essay corrects Schumann's reading of Origen by urging enlightenment theology to search for "Zeit angemessenere Beweise"[383] [other kinds of evidence more appropriate to his time]. The problem was that Schumann omitted an essential detail when he cited Origen. To acknowledge the oversight, Lessing used Schumann's omitted detail as the epigraph for his essay, making it the starting point for his critique against historical proofs. After going back to the original source, Lessing noticed that the binding force of religion is not limited to just historical proofs, which he makes explicit almost immediately in the *Beweis* essay through the following passage:

> Den *Origens* anführen, und ihn sagen lassen, "daß der Beweis der Kraft wegen der erstaunlichen Wunder so heiße, die zur Bestätigung der Lehre Christi geschehen," ist nicht allzuwohl getan wenn man das, was unmittelbar bei dem Origenes darauf folgt, seinen Lesern verschweigt. Denn die Leser werden den Origenes auch aufschlagen, und mit Befremden finden, daß er die Wahrheit jener bei der Grundlegung des Christentums geschehenen Wunder, *ἐκ πολλων μεν ἀλλων*, und also aus der Erzählung der Evangelisten wohl *mit*, aber doch vornehmlich und namentlich aus den Wundern erweiset, die noch damals geschahen.[384]
>
> [To quote *Origen* to the effect that "the proof of power is so called on account of the prodigious miracles which have taken place to confirm the teachings of Christ" is not very helpful if one omits to tell one's readers what Origen says immediately afterwards. For these readers will consult Origen and discover to their astonishment that he demonstrates the truth of these miracles which occurred at the foundations of Christianity "by this argument among many others," i.e. from the narrative of the evangelists *among many other things*, but primarily and specifically through the miracles which were still happening then.]

For Lessing, the citation of Origen in Schumann's introduction was "not very helpful" to its readers because it appeared as if the truth of Christianity rested entirely on historical testimony, when in fact Origen viewed history as just one means "among many other[s]"[385] in which religious

[383] Ibid., p. 440.
[384] Ibid., p. 440–41.
[385] This holds true elsewhere in Origen as well. In his writings on the letter of religion ("From word-

subjects could bind themselves to their faith. According to Lessing, Schumann's preference for historical proof was held up by his belief in the inerrancy of scripture,[386] which claims that the bible—in its "original manuscripts"[387]—is void of any errors with respect to its teachings since the authors were divinely inspired. To undermine this theory, Lessing claimed that the belief in scripture's inerrancy is itself "no more than historically certain."[388] More central to Lessing's

scripture to word-spirit") he argues that "The kingdom of heaven is likened to a net of varied texture because the scripture of the old and new testament is woven together from all kinds of variegated thoughts. And just as with the fishes that fall into the net, some are found in one part of the net and others in another, and each in the part where it was caught, so too will you find in the case of those who have come into the net of the scriptures that some have been caught by the prophetic net, others by the net of the law, and others by that of the gospel, and some by the apostolic net. In Balthasar, Hans Urs von, ed., *Origen: Spirit and Fire: A Thematic Anthology of His Writings*, trans. Robert J. Daly, Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2001, p. 95.

[386] For a sense of Schumann's views on the inerrancy of scripture see the section of his treatise titled "Ohngeachtet der Evidenz der Beweise ist der göttliche Glaube dennoch notwendig" [Regardless of the evidence, divine faith is nevertheless necessary]. Here he writes, for instance, "Ich nehme die bemerkten Zeugnisse der Schrift von der übernatürlichen Wirkung der Gnade mit aufrichtigem herzen und nach ihrem wahren Sinne an. Ich erkenne die Notwendigkeit einer göttlichen Befestigung der Seele, auch bei dem Gelehrten, der die Stärke menschlicher Überzeugungsmittel in ihrer ganzen Kraft fühlt; und finde in dieser Behauptung nichts, welches mit der Natur unsers Verstandes in einem Streite läge" [I accept the written testimonies grounded on the supernatural effects of grace with a sincere heart and according to their true sense. I recognize the necessity of a divine attachment of the soul, even to the scholar, who feels the strength of human means of persuasion in all its power; and find nothing in this assertion which would be in conflict with the nature of our reason]. From *Über die Evidenz der Beweise*, in Lessing, *Werke und Briefe*, Band 8, hrsg. von Arno Schilson, Frankfurt am Main: Deutsche Klassiker Verlag, 1989, p. 366–68. Translation mine.

[387] The assumption that the "original manuscripts" of scripture have been transmitted without any "corruption" is a highly fraught claim. For a discussion of how theologians in the eighteenth century learned ancient Greek and Hebrew in order to clear up controversies that were detrimental to Church doctrines, see Karl Aner's *Theologie der Lessingzeit*, Hildesheim: G. Olms, 1964. Aner argues that theologians used their knowledge of ancient languages to alter the canon, rejecting certain manuscripts that conflicted with their doctrines by claiming that they were added after the original manuscripts had been written (i.e. they were not divinely inspired and could therefore be forgotten).

[388] See both Lessing's *Beweis* and his *Axiomata*, where he engages with Goeze on this same issue. Here he writes that he opposes not only Goeze, but also Luther and "the entire Wittenberg compendia": Die historischen Worte sind das *Vehiculum* des prophetischen Wortes. Ein *Vehiculum* aber soll und darf die Kraft der Natur der Arzenei nicht haben" [The historical words are the *vehicle* for the prophetic word. But a vehicle should not and cannot have the strength and nature of the medicine it contains]. Lessing, *Axiomata*, II (4). In: Lessing, *Werke in drei Bänden*, München: Deutsche Taschenbuch Verlag, 2003, Band III, p 452.

attack, however, was the fact that enlightenment theologians continued to advance historical arguments for the truth of Christianity, which was about as legitimate as Schumann's reading of Origen. Lessing described the problem by putting it into perspective, claiming that if he had lived during the times of Origen and saw miracles and fulfilled prophecies first hand, then there would be no room for doubt. "Aber ich," Lessing writes, "der auch nicht einmal mehr in dem Falle des Origenes bin; der ich dem 18ten Jahrhunderte lebe, in welchem es keine Wunder mehr giebt; wenn ich anstehe, noch jetzt […] zu glauben […] woran liegt es?"[389] [But if I, who am no longer in Origen's position, live in the eighteenth century in which miracles no longer happen, if I hesitate now to believe why is this so?]. Lessing "hesitates" because the medium of history is itself inadequate to the task of demonstrating the necessity of Christian truth: "Daß Nachrichten von erfüllten Weissagungen nicht erfüllte Weissagungen sind; daß Nachrichten von Wunder nicht Wunder sind" [reports of fulfilled prophecies are not fulfilled prophecies; reports of miracles are not miracles]. This much is non-negotiable for Lessing. Anyone who denies this must absurdly assume, along with Schumann, that there is no epistemic difference between reading testimonies of events and directly experiencing them.[390] To drive his point home, Lessing poses the following

[389] Lessing, *Beweis*, in *Werke und Briefe*, Band 8, hrsg. von Arno Schilson, Frankfurt am Main: Deutsche Klassiker Verlag, 1989, p. 440.

[390] With respect to his argument, Lessing makes no distinction between sacred and secular histories. In fact, he includes an example of Alexander the Great's life to advance his point: "Wir alle glauben, daß ein Alexander gelebt hat, welcher in kurzer Zeit fast ganz Asien besiegte […] Wer wollte, diesem Glauben zu Folge, aller Kenntnis auf ewig abschwören, die mit diesem Glauben stritte? Ich wahrlich nicht. Ich habe jetzt gegen den Alexander und seine Siege nichts einzuwenden: aber es wäre doch möglich, daß sie sich eben so wohl auf ein bloßes Gedicht des Choerilus, welcher den Alexander überall begleitete, gründeten, als die zehn-jährige Belagerung von Troja sich auf weiter nichts, als auf die Gedichte des Homers gründet" [We all believe that someone called Alexander lived who in a short time conquered almost the whole of Asia […] Who, as a result of this belief, would permanently disavow all knowledge that conflicted with this belief. I certainly would not. I have at present no objection to raise against Alexander and his victories; but it might still be possible that they were based on a mere poem of Choerilus, who accompanied Alexander everywhere, just as the ten-year siege of Troy is based on nothing more than the poems of Homer]. Ibid., 442.

rhetorical question: "[…] ist ohne Ausnahme, was ich bei glaubwürdigen Geschichtschreibern lese, für mich eben so gewiß, als was ich selbst erfahre?" [is what I read from reliable historians invariably just as certain as what I experience myself?].

Here, at the center of the fragment controversy, the problem of doubting Thomas finds expression in the crisis of historical proof that has consumed enlightenment theology. However, unlike Klopstock, Lessing did not attempt to overcome religious skepticism by introducing a new poetic language (i.e. using poetry to increase the affective force of biblical history); unlike neology, he did not seek to maintain and preserve church doctrine by overlooking ignominious details of scripture (i.e. "harmonizing" revelation with reason); unlike deism, he did not reject revealed knowledge on rational grounds;[391] finally, unlike orthodox Lutherans, he did not view biblical history as free of contradiction. Rather, Lessing lifts himself out of the quagmire of historical proofs by looking for evidence elsewhere. If, Lessing asks, history can no longer bind modernity to its faith, then what does? "Was verbindet mich denn dazu" [What, then, binds me to my faith]. His answer: "Nichts, als diese Lehren selbst" [Nothing but the teachings themselves]. As I have already suggested elsewhere, this solution locates the binding force of Christianity in the ethos embedded in the stories of the bible rather than in a higher logos (or pathos) made available through a specialized understanding of history or through rigorous intellectual labor. In fact, Lessing reminds his audience that the teachings were designed to "help common sense find the right track."[392] For Lessing, this movement, which I would describe as a movement from the page to

[391] This is explicit in his *Beweis* essay: "Ich leugne gar nicht, daß in Christus Weissagungen erfüllt worden; ich leugne gar nicht, daß Christus Wunder getan" [I do not deny for a moment that prophecies were fulfilled by Christ; I do not deny for a moment that Christ performed miracles]. Ibid., p. 444.
[392] The complete German quote reads, "Die Menge aber auf etwas aufmerksam machen, heißt, den gesunden Menschenverstand auf die Spur helfen." Ibid., p. 444. The link between common sense and the

the heart, can only be measured by the efficacy of the stories (i.e. how well they condition their reader to willfully reproduce the underlying ethos in a very mundane sense). In other words, to ascertain the truth of Christianity one does not need to force the outward facts of history into a closed rational system; rather its legitimacy can be proved independent of history by evaluating how well the ethical doctrines of the stories serve practical life.

After Lessing articulates his main argument against historical proofs, he significantly changes the style of his writing. He stops offering arguments and becomes more figurative in his use of language.[393] Consider, for instance, Lessing's appeal to the experiential value of short, powerful narratives at the end of his *Beweis* essay. Here Lessing's theology clearly pivots away from historical veracity by attempting to ground the legitimacy of a story on the potential effects that it occasions in a reader:

> Diese Früchte sähe ich vor mir reifen und gereift, und ich sollte mich damit nicht sättigen dürfen? Weil ich die alte fromme Sage, daß die Hand, die den Samen dazu ausgestreuet, sich siebenmal bei jedem Wurfe in Schneckenblute waschen müssen—nicht etwa legnete, nicht etwa bezweifelte—sondern bloß an ihren Ort gestellt sein ließe?—Was kümmert es mich, ob die Sage falsch oder wahr ist: die Früchte sind trefflich.[394]

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metaphor of the heart was central to pietism. Gadamer explains in his *Truth and Method* how Christoph Friedrich Oetinger translated Shaftesbury's essay on *Sensus Communis*: "the pietist Oetinger explicitly relied on Shaftesbury's defense of the sensus communis. We find sensus communis translated simply as 'heart' and the following description: 'The sensus communis is concerned only with things that all men see daily before them, things that hold an entire society together, things that are concerned as much with truths and statements as with the arrangements and patterns comprised in statements'" (p. 25–26). Gadamer, Hans-Georg, *Truth and method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall, London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013.

[393] Insofar as his conception of spirit unfolds along metaphorical lines, Lessing's use of the term breaks with the Hebrew tradition that uses the term "ruah" [wind or breath] for spirit, which gives it with a sense of phenomenal concreteness, something which Tertullian (in opposition to Origen) fought vigorously to preserve.

[394] Lessing, *Beweis*, in *Werke und Briefe*, Band 8, hrsg. von Arno Schilson, Frankfurt am Main, Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1989, p. 444.

> [And if I see these fruits ripening and ripened before me, am I not supposed to eat my fill of them? Because, while I did not deny or doubt the pious old legend that the hand which scattered the seed had to wash seven times in snails' blood before each throw, I simply disregarded it? What does it matter to me whether the old legend is true or false? The fruits are excellent.]

By investing subjective experience with just as much authority as a historical proof, Lessing pays lip service to pietism,[395] which held practical wisdom above historical veracity and tradition. At the same time, for Lessing to legitimize the "pious old legend" even though it appears shot through with superstition represents a provocation insofar as enlightenment theology worked tirelessly to dilute superstition through a variety of means, including its translation practices.[396] More importantly, the central image of "eating excellent fruits" not only recalls Paul's *Letter to the Galatians*, in which he urged community members to follow the spirit of the law rather than its letter,[397] but it also smuggles in the aesthetic category of taste, which, is more concerned with establishing norms rather than determining objective truth. In the passage, Lessing essentially describes legends (containing miracles and prophecies) in terms of their mythological status, implying that they should not be dismissed because they lack demonstrative power in a

[395] In his *Pia Desideria* Johann Spener worked through related problems and used a similar language to confront those problems. At the time, he was concerned about the different religious sects constantly disputing the letter of religion, arguing that these polemicists "think that everything has turned out well if only they know how to give [the correct] answer to the errors of the papists, the Reformed, the Anabaptists, etc. They pay no attention [however] to the fruits of those articles of faith [under dispute], which we presumably still hold in common with them or of those rules of morality which are acknowledged by us all." See Spener, Philipp Jacob, *Pia Desideria*, trans. Theodore G. Tappert, Fortress Press, 1964, p. 49.

[396] Jonathan Sheehan writes that "in the case of the demoniacs, then, modernization demanded rewriting the Jewish superstition of spiritual possession as a form of ordinary madness. Possession might have rung true to the ancient Hebrew ear, but it would not do for the modern German one." *The Enlightenment Bible: Translation, Scholarship, Culture*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005, p. 140.

[397] The image also calls back to Paul's Letter to the Galatians (5:22) in which he too prioritizes practical wisdom over the letter of the law: "the fruit of the Spirit [as] love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control."

philosophical sense.[398] Rather, the power of the "legends" is demonstrated immanently through their ability to shape the moral universe within. Here, in the "inner truth" of religion, as Lessing puts it elsewhere,[399] is where enlightenment theologians should search for the fruits of their conviction. After all, it was the inner truth of religion, according to Lessing, that prompted the evangelists to compose their "legends" in the first place: "Die Religion ist nicht wahr, weil die Evangelisten und Apostel sie lehrten: sondern sie lehrten sie, weil sie wahr ist. Aus ihrer innern Wahrheit müssen die schriftlichen Überlieferungen erklärt werden, und all schriftliche Überlieferungen können ihr keine innere Wahrheit geben, wenn sie keine hat"[400] [The religion is not true because the evangelists and apostles taught it; on the contrary, they taught it because it is true. The written records must be explained by its inner truth, and none of the written records can give it any inner truth if it does not already have it].

However, the "inner truth" of religion should not be understood as a vulgar form of subjectivism that stands in hostile opposition to the letter of religion or hermeneutic conventions more generally. As Lessing explains to Goeze, who challenged this aspect of his theology,[401]

[398] Of course Reimarus' "solution" to the problem of evidence was to reject Christianity wholesale.
[399] See Lessing's *Gegensätze* and also his *Axiomata X*.
[400] Lessing, *Gegensätze*, in *Werke und Briefe*, Band 8, hrsg. von Arno Schilson, Frankfurt am Main, Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1989, p. 313.
[401] Goeze feared that Lessing was setting a bad precedent in the way he distinguished between the letter and spirit of religion. In the opening paragraph of his *Etwas Vorläufiges* he invoked Luther's confession on the sacrament of communion, writing: "Wer so kühn ist, dass er tut Gott leugnen und Lügen strafen in einem Worte, und tut solches mutwillig wieder und über das, so er ein oder zwei mal ermahnet oder unterrichtet ist, der tut Gott in allen Worten leugnen und Lügen strafen. Darum heißt es rund und rein, ganz und alles geglaubt, oder nichts geglaubt. Die heilige Schrift läßt sich nicht trennen oder theilen, daß sie ein Stück sollte wahrhaftig, und das andere falsch lehren und glauben laßen" [Anyone who is so bold that he denies and blasphemes against God in one word, and wilfully does so again and again, if he is once or twice admonished or taught, will deny and blaspheme against God in every word. That is why we are told, pure and simple, believe everything or nothing at all. Holy Scripture cannot be separated or divided, so that one part is believed to instruct truly, another falsely]. Goeze, Melchior Johann. "Etwas Vorläufiges…" in *Goezes Streitschriften gegen Lessing*, hrsg. von Erich Schmidt, in Deutsche

"Wenn [die Absichten der Ausleger] keine innere Güte haben: so können die Religionssätze, die er mir beibringen will, auch keine innere Wahrheit haben. Die innere Wahrheit ist keine wächserne Nase, die sich jeder Schelm nach seinem Gesichte bossieren kann, wie er will"[402] [If the interpreter's intentions have no inner goodness, then the religious propositions which he wishes to impart to me can have no inner truth either. The inner truth is not a wax nose which any rogue can shape to fit his face as he pleases.] In other words, the integrity of a spiritual reading of scripture depends on how well an exegete captures the inner truth of religion through a particular reading of it, much like Lessing described to Mendelssohn in his letter.

In my view Lessing does not, as some scholars have implied, "dispense" with biblical history, but instead he asks his modern readers to bring a different Denkungsart[403] [manner of thinking] to it.[404] For example, Lessing's argument against historical proofs does not seek to secularize religion and its history (as Schumann feared), though it does attempt to secularize human reason, which, in the context of enlightenment theology, was trained to treat scripture as it

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Litteraturdenkmale des 18. Und 19. Jahrhunderts, Kraus Reprint, Liechtenstein: Nendeln, 1968, p. 4. Translation mine.

[402] Lessing, *Werke in drei Bänden*, Band III, München: Deutsche Taschenbuch Verlag, 2003, p. 467.Translation mine.

[403] If one looks back far enough, the manner of historical thinking that Lessing advocates is not so "different" or "new." It would perhaps be better described in Blumenbergian terms as a reoccupation of the interpretive practices of the Church Fathers to confront the absolutism of "scientific" theology that flourished during the Enlightenment. A good source on the subject of the interpretive practices of Early Church is the chapter on "Figura" in Eric Auerbach and Paolo Valesio, *Scenes from the Drama of European Literature*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984.

[404] In his otherwise excellent study on Novalis, Nicholas Saul claims that Lessing's *Beweis* essay encourages readers to "think of the historical document and the event as secondary, if not quite conclusively dispensable" (p. 29). See Saul, Nicholas, *History and Poetry in Novalis and in the Tradition of the German Enlightenment*, London: Institute of Germanic Studies, University of London, 1984. John Smith reaches a similar conclusion in his *Dialogues between Faith and Reason*, claiming that if historical truths "become a burden, we can drop them without fear" (p. 82). See Smith, John H., *Dialogues between Faith and Reason: The Death and Return of God in Modern German Thought*, New York: Cornell University Press, 2011.

did God, namely as absolute, omnipotent, and transhistorical. This different manner of thinking is admittedly dangerous insofar as it reduces the significance of Christianity to its spiritual history, in which case the urgency of knowing the particular historical facts diminishes. However, parts of the Old Testament already exhibit the manner of thinking that Lessing advocates. For instance, the psalmists who composed the so-called ascent psalms ascent psalms (120–134) interpreted the historical conquest of Palestine anagogically, as a kind of upward ascent or pilgrimage to the "promised land," sweeping the particularities of that history into a (Zionist) narrative about salvation.[405] There will be further occasion to explore the implications of this danger in the following chapter on Novalis' *Die Christenheit oder Europa*, but for now it is worth acknowledging before considering some of the salient features of Lessing's *Erziehung des Menschengeschlechts* in which he offers a spiritual reading of Christian history in terms of its salvific potential. In this text, Lessing interprets the bible not as an empirical history that discloses a set of binding laws to be obeyed, but rather as signs that reveal the edifying potential of history—as signs that demand interpretation and re-interpretation.

It is already evident from the preface of Lessing's *Erziehung* that he reads biblical history more in terms of signs that serve to dimly illuminate future pathways for humanity's improvement, rather than as a set of facts needing to be verified prior to any confession of faith. However, before turning to the preface some attention must be paid to the epigraph Lessing includes. He again cites an Early Church Father, this time Augustine, who, in his *Soliloquies*, sustains a fictitious dialogue

[405] Compare lines 3–8 of Psalm 121, which speak of the Lord as a "keeper," or guardian of Jerusalem with Exodus 23:20, which assures the pilgrim: "I am going to send an angel in front of you, to guard you on the way and to bring you to the place that I have prepared."

with himself and (personified) reason to search for knowledge of God and the soul's immortality.[406] Lessing used the following passage from Augustine's *Soliloquies* as his epigraph: "All these things are in certain respects true for the same reason that they are in certain respects false." The "things" that Augustine referred to were works of art, and the "dialogue" in this context turns on questions of art's truthfulness. Much like in his *Beweis* essay here too the epigraph offers a rich back-story. Prior to the passage in question, Augustine described the difference between lies and deception, stating that those who lie "differ from those who are deceptive, in that everyone who is deceptive wishes to deceive, but not everyone who lies wishes to deceive."[407] From there, Augustine provided some examples to help clarify his point, one of which involved a Roman actor by the name of Roscius (126–62 BC), who, on the stage, "was a true tragic actor, because he played his part, but a false Priam, because he imitated Priam though he was not Priam."[408] In being "false," Roscius is able to demonstrate something true, namely, that he is a great actor of tragedy. From these reflections and examples Augustine reaches a conclusion that Lessing left out of his epigraph. It reads, "if some things are helped to be true by their being somewhat false, [then] why do we so greatly fear falsehoods and strive for truth as though for some great good?"[409] In other words, the "falsehoods" of an artwork can help reveal truths that may otherwise be obscure to reason, thus

[406] For a historical investigation into the formal significance of the soliloquy in relation to the platonic dialogue see Stock, Brian, *Augustine's Inner Dialogue: The Philosophical Soliloquy in Late Antiquity*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010. Stock writes, for instance: "At a theoretical level soliloquies have their place in [Augustine's] philosophy of language. In his view, inner words are closer to truth than outer words within the hierarchy of communication which leads upwards to the Word of God. Augustine also sees internal dialogue as a way of uniting the rational methods of the Platonic dialogue with the inward, elevational, and transcendental orientation of Plotinian Neoplatonism" (p. 230).
[407] Augustine, *Soliloquies: Augustine's Inner Dialogue*, New York: New City Press, 2000, p. 72.
[408] Ibid., p. 74.
[409] Ibid.

pursuing things that are false could also lead to "some good." Of interest to this study is how Lessing applies Augustine's insight on artworks to historical narratives.[410]

By including this fragment of Augustine's argument, Lessing attempts to condition his readers to think differently about historical truth prior to reading his *Erziehung*. As scholars like Hayden White and Reinhart Koselleck have noted, around 1750 perspectives on historiography begin to shift from "Historie," as the mere reportage of facts and occurrences, to Geschichte, as narratives that use poetic conventions like emplotment to create coherent and didactic stories.[411] In many ways, Lessing's *Erziehung* manifests the concept of Geschichte, insofar as it does not see the entanglement of poetry and history, or the entanglement of truth and lies in the sense that Augustine indicates, as a problem.[412] This much can be ascertained by considering the form of the *Erziehung* text, which is somewhat difficult to pin down, as some scholars have referred to it as a philosophical-religious manifesto,[413] others calling it "the Magna Carta of chiliasm,"[414] while most simply refer to it as an essay or treatise. Another option, which to my knowledge has not yet been explored, is that the form of Lessing's *Erziehung* approximates that of an epigrammata, or collection of epigrams that can sometimes sustain coherent through-lines as in the sections

[410] Even Augustine's example reflects a porous relationship between history and poetry insofar as Roscius is playing the part of Priam during the Trojan War.
[411] White, Hayden, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990; Koselleck, Reinhart, *Future's Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, trans. Keith Tribe. MIT Press, 1985. A more recent study on this subject is Robert Lehmann's *Impossible Modernisms*, Stanford: Stanford Univerity Press, 2016.
[412] In his earlier *Briefe, die neuste Literatur betreffend* (1759–65) Lessing even described the poet as "the master of history" in the 63rd letter, in which he defends poets like Wieland and Milton who work with historical material in their poetic writings against their critics. Here he writes: "Doch lassen Sie mich nicht wie ein Gottschedianer kritisieren! Der Dichter ist Herr über die Geschichte!; und er kann die Begebenheiten so nahe zusammen rücken, als er will. Ich sage: der ist Herr über die Geschichte!" Lessing, *Briefe, die neueste Literatur betreffend*, Leipzig: Reclam Verlag, 1987, p. 195.
[413] See Yasukata, Toshimasa, *Lessing's Philosophy of Religion and the German Enlightenment*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2003, p. 89.
[414] See Taubes, Jacob, *Occidental Eschatology*, trans. David Ratmoko, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2009, p. 133.

representing the idea of a "New Eternal Gospel" (§86–§92), while at other times appearing quite singular in their presentation. It is as if Lessing wished to introduce an entirely new form of historical writing that has become conscious of its status as both poetic and historical—a form of historico-mythical narration that regards the sublimity of Historie as a precondition for its aesthetic (trans)figuration into Geschichte which orders historical events into novel sequences.

Formal considerations aside, the Augustine epigraph also serves as a useful heuristic for reading Lessing's *Erziehung*, which is itself not empty of contradiction or apparent "falsehoods." In fact, one can take recourse in the epigraph when confronting the infamous contradiction between §4 and §77 that continues to perplex Lessing scholars.[415] The basic contradiction involves the assertion that Lessing makes in §4, in which revelation is said to give nothing to humanity that reason could not arrive at on its own, adding only that revelation expedites the process on a collective level. However, later in §77 Lessing appears to contradict himself when he writes: "warum sollten wir nicht auch durch eine Religion, mit deren historischen Wahrheit, wenn man will, es so mißlich aussieht, gleichwohl auf nähere und bessere Begriffe vom göttlichen Wesen, von unsrer Natur, von unsern Verhältnissen zu Gott, geleitet werden können, auf welche die menschliche Vernunft von selbst nimmermehr gekommen wäre?" [Why should we not nevertheless be guided by a religion whose historical truth, one may think, looks so dubious, to better and more precise conceptions of the divine being, of our own nature, and of our relations

[415] See for example Yasukata, Toshimasa, *Lessing's Philosophy of Religion and the German Enlightenment*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2003. Yasukata writes at length to try and resolve the "apparent" contradiction between sections 4 and 77, even after working through the context of Augustine's *Soliloquies*. Of sections 4 and 77 he writes: "Is this not a sheer contradiction? Or if these two propositions are not mutually contradictory but are supposed to hold true together, how, then, do they relate to each other? This is precisely the question that has tortured Lessing scholars" (p. 106–7). His solution is to read the subsequent sections as a sublation of the contradiction.

with God, which human reason would never have arrived at on its own?]. On the one hand, Lessing claims that reason can arrive at religious concepts independent of revelation (§4), but on the other hand he limits reason by suggesting that some religious knowledge is only made available through revelation (§77). This apparent contradiction is a source of vexation for scholars who believe that the main objective of enlightenment theology was to replace revelation by reason,[416] though it must be emphasized that reason and revelation are not opposed in Lessing's religious writings. In fact, as I mentioned earlier, Lessing saw education and culture as advancing the work of revelation, rather than as abandoning or undermining it, which he makes clear prior to the sections in question, writing: "Erziehung ist Offenbarung, die dem einzeln Menschen geschieht" [Education is revelation imparted to the individual].[417] The point I wish to make is simply that reason and revelation interact symbiotically in a joint effort to improve humanity. Readers of Lessing's *Erziehung* should also keep in mind that the first half of it was already published several years earlier in his *Gegensätze*, which took issue with Reimarus' historical-critical approach to scripture. The "lesson" to be drawn from that context also applies here, namely, the law of contradiction cannot be the criterion by which we make historical judgments.

[416] Only natural theology (deism) was interested in supplanting revelation; Neology and Orthodox Lutheranism attempted to harmonize reason and revelation. See my section III of this chapter.
[417] That culture plays a vital role in education is obvious from §26, where Lessing discusses the "Gegenbilde der Offenbarung": "Ich erkläre mich an dem Gegenbilde der Offenbarung. Ein Elementarbuch für Kinder, darf gar wohl dieses oder jenes wichtige Stück der Wissenschaft oder Kunst, die es vorträgt, mit Stillschweigen übergehen, von dem der Pädagog urteilte, daß es den Fähigkeiten der Kinder, für die er schrieb, noch nicht angemessen sei" [I shall explain myself by means of the counter-image to revelation. A primer (here Lessing means the Old Testament and New Testament) for children may very well pass over in silence this or that important part of the science or art which it expounds, if the teacher judges that it is not yet appropriate to the capacities of the children for whom he is writing].

The figure of the author/traveller in the preface of Lessing's *Erziehung* is another point of interest for this study. It does a lot of work for the entire premise of the text, especially the idea of reading history in terms of signs, or "Fingerzeige"[418] as the editor calls it,[419] though an alternative to "sign" could be "figura." Insofar as "Finger" preserves the Latin root *fingere* (to regulate), Lessing's use of "Fingerzeige" maps on to Eric Auerbach's historical exposition of *figura*,[420] in which he traces the development of the term from antiquity to the Middle Ages. According to Auerbach, the Church Father Tertullian, by claiming that Christ represents "a figure of things to come," introduced an entirely new application of *figura* which radically broke with Roman and Greek conventions. He writes, the "*figura* is something real and historical which announces something else that is also real and historical. The relation between two events is revealed by an accord or similarity [which] make the *figura* recognizable."[421] The classic examples of a *figura* are seeing Moses as a prefiguration of Christ and (more generally) the Old Testament as a prefiguration of the New Testament, both of which find expression in Lessing's *Erziehung*. Regardless of whether "sign" or "figura" is the better term, a close reading of Lessing's preface is in order. It

[418] I use the term "sign" rather than the literal "indicator" or "pointer" for several reasons. First, in the context of travelling, sign is more appropriate. Second, because the rich etymology of the term "Zeig" connotes the idea of something providing orientation in the sense of "auf etwas deuten," or something that directs one's attention to something "das, worauf man hindeutet, worauf man jemandes Aufmerksamkeit lenkt"; it also connotes that which allows one to see something: "sehen lassen; sichtbar werden." (See Jacob Grimm, *Das Deutsches Wörterbuch*).

[419] Lessing tried to remain anonymous as the editor of the *Gegensätze*, and here plays on the relationship between an editor and an author, where the former holds the latter in check. See Peter Gilgen's *Lekturen der Errinerung*, in which he identifies analogous structures between the editor and the author of Lessing's *Erziehung* and Augustine's monologue with reason in the *Soliloquies*. Gilgen, Peter, *Lektüren der Erinnerung: Lessing, Hegel, Kant*, Paderborn: Wilhelm Fink, 2012.

[420] Auerbach, Erich, and Paolo Valesio, *Scenes from the Drama of European Literature*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984. The connection is clear from the opening sentence: "Originally *figura*, from the same stem as *fingere*, *figulus*, *fictor*, and *effigies*, meant 'plastic form'" (p. 11).

[421] Ibid., p. 28–29.

begins with the editor describing the author's vantage point from which he can both retrace the steps he has travelled and also look out into a vast distance that has yet to be explored. In this way the traveler's perspective is circumscribed by a theological dialectic, in which the view he enjoys *reveals* something about his journey, while also concealing something about the journey still ahead:

> Der Verfasser hat sich darin auf einen Hügel gestellt, von welchem er etwas mehr, als den vorgeschriebenen Weg seines heutigen Tages zu übersehen glaubt. Aber er ruft keinen eilfertigen Wanderer, der nur das Nachtlager bald zu erreichen wünscht, von seinem Pfade. Er verlangt nicht, daß die Aussicht, die ihn entzücket, auch jedes andere Auge entzücken müsse. Und so, dächte ich, könnte man ihn ja wohl stehen und staunen lassen, wo er steht und staunt! Wenn er aus der unermeßlichen Ferne, die ein sanftes Abendrot seinem Blicke weder ganz verhüllt noch ganz entdeckt, nun gar einen Fingerzeig mitbrächte, um den ich oft verlegen gewesen[422]!
>
> [The author has placed himself on a hill, from which he believes he can see rather more than the prescribed course of his present day's journey. But he does not call on any hasty traveller, who wishes only to reach his overnight lodging, to deviate from his path. He does not expect that the view which delights him should also delight every other eye. And so, I should think, we could very well leave him to stand and wonder where he stands and wonders! But what if he were to bring back from that immeasurable distance, which a soft evening glow neither wholly conceals nor wholly reveals, a sign I have often felt in need of!][423]

The idea of a viewpoint is foregrounded through the traveler's perspective. His position on top of a hill affords a view from which he can take stock of the day's journey, seeing precisely the steps he took in order to arrive at that particular location. Such an image conjures up the idea of Historie as if each step held the status of an event that can be causally related to the next. Important

[422] Lessing, *Werke in drei Bänden*, Band III, München: Deutsche Taschenbuch Verlag, 2003, Band III, p. 637.
[423] Hugh Nisbet, the translator of Lessing that I have been using, translates *Fingerzeige* as "pointer," which I have replaced with "sign" for the sake of conceptual consistency.

is the caveat that the traveler's view might not "delight every other eye," a detail that both indexes the famous Horatian dictum for poets,[424] while denying the traveler's perspective any claim to universality. This perspective is held in dramatic tension with another view, namely, that of the "immeasurable" horizon. This perspective of indeterminacy induces a state of wonder, in which the traveler is brought to a momentary standstill, which the editor emphasizes by repeating the expression of letting him "stand and wonder where he stands and wonders." The repetition suggests that a roadblock stops the traveler from advancing any further. At that point, the editor is not satisfied and speculates about the possibility of the traveler retrieving a sign, which is useful to the extent that it satisfies a need. But what need could this sign possibly fulfill for the editor, who on all counts acts as a witness to this painfully limited history? In the greater context of the fragment controversy, I understand the sign to serve as compensation for the loss of historical proofs, as if it were a kind of epistemic contract in which theologians agree to interpret history in terms of *meaning* rather than certainty. In other words, the significance of the traveler's steps (which yields two distinct perspectives) is more important for the editor than the fact that they did or did not happen. To read the steps of the traveller as a history of signs is to consider the significance of those steps in relation to a future destination, which ultimately satisfies the needs of the editor.

In closing, Lessing's epigrammatic narrative weaves *a* history of revelation and reason into an image of universal progress. Such images of progress should be (and have been) looked upon

[424] In his *Ars Poetica*, Horace writes that "poetry aims at both instruction and pleasure." The German sentence carries the force of a "should" insofar as the traveller does not expect that "auch jedes andere Auge entzücken müsse." In this way, it is not expected that the viewpoint delights every other eye, but it can still serve as a goal even if unrealizable. The structure is also consistent with Lessing's aesthetic thought. See my section II, and the letter to Mendelssohn above. Horace, *Satires, Epistles and Ars Poetica*, London: W. Heinemann, 1929, p. 447.

both with a sense of suspicion and hope. There are too many examples to cite here, however, Lessing would have been familiar with at least one, which was published nearly twenty-five years before his *Erziehung*. Rousseau, in his *Discourse on the Inequality of Man*, challenged prevailing assumptions about historical progress by arguing that cultural advancement actually makes human life increasingly more difficult, essentially turning the enlightenment's narrative of progress on its head.[425] Perhaps a more "hopeful" example can be found in the works of Novalis, who intended to compose a sequel to Lessing's *Erziehung*. I use the term hopeful with caution because Novalis made some rather critical interventions against Lessing, although he found enough material in Lessing's theological writings to try his luck at better expressing the spirit of the *Erziehung*. Sadly, Novalis' life was cut short and he never completed the project; however, his *Die Christenheit oder Europa* is perhaps the closest thing to a sequel we have.

[425] The analogy between the erosion of the statue of Glaucus over time and the erosion of mankind's soul captures the spirit of his argument. See Rousseau, Jean-Jacques, *The Essential Writings of Rousseau*, ed. Leo Damrosch, trans. Peter Constantine, New York: Modern Library, 2013.

CHAPTER THREE[426]

Paradigms for a Romantic Conception of Spirit: Novalis and the Question of Mediation

I. Toward a Redemption of the Letter: Novalis' Fragments for a Poetic History

> Über die Verwandlung des Geistes in Buchstaben: Der Buchstabe ist—was ein Tempel oder Monument ist; Ohne Bedeutung ist es freylich todt. Es giebt geistvolle Historiker des Buchstabens—Philologische *Antiquare*, der eigentlich ein Restaurator des Buchstabens sind—ein *Aufwecker*.[427]
>
> [On the transformation of the spirit into the letter: the letter is like a temple or monument; without meaning it is truly dead. There are spirited historians of the letter—philological antiquarians, who actually restore and resurrect the letter.]
>
> —Novalis, *Fragmente und Studien I*, #196

Even though Lessing helped enlightenment theology get out of the problem of historical proofs, the ambiguities contained in his religious writings brought new problems to light. One of those concerned the distinction between poetry and history, between art and religion, which became increasingly porous after 1780. As I argued in the first chapter of this study, the poetics of *Der Messias* assumed—at least nominally—a subordinate position as it worked to increase the force of revealed knowledge by paraphrasing scripture into the idiom of affect poetry. However,

[426] Unless otherwise indicated all translations from Novalis come from the two following English Translations: Novalis. *Philosophical Writings*. Trans. Margaret Mahony Stoljar. Albany: SUNY, 1997; Novalis. *Henry von Ofterdingen*. Trans. Palmer Hilty. Illinois: Waveland Press, 1964.

[427] Novalis. *Werke, Tagebücher und Briefe Friedrich von Hardenbergs*. Hrsg. von Hans-Joachim Mähl und Richard Samuel. Carl Hanser Verlag: München, 2005. Band II, p. 777. Translation mine.

Klopstock's adaptation of Doubting Thomas showed a different picture; one in which he did more than simply "walk in the footsteps of scripture," but instead forged new pathways that expanded, revised, and clarified the historical narratives of the bible. Thus, Klopstock's poetic amplifications tried to overcome religious skepticism by increasing the authority of biblical history, intensifying dogma through affective representation. Lessing, by contrast, did not wish to increase the authority of history, but rather wanted to empower modern readers of history. To accomplish this, he trained readers to forge the bonds of their faith in the living proof of the bible, which resides in the spirit of religion—in the ability of the stories themselves to "spark" feelings of conviction and to witness those convictions play out both in the immediate social field and across history. In the previous chapter, I argued that the aesthetic structures of Lessing's *Laokoon* also found expression in his religious thought, especially with respect to his claim that revelation fulfills the function of education (i.e. gradually revealing more fully to human reason latent truths that at one point seemed like an incomplete torso). However, the strength of this argument diminishes if one reflects on the message of Lessing's *Testament des Johannis*, which appears to work against the claim that the concept of the "pregnant moment" is operational in his theory of religious education. Taken out of context, this document demythologizes scripture by reducing its significance to the Christian doctrine of love, as if the rich particularities contained in the histories and myths of the bible were ancillary at best, distracting at worst. Taken in context, however, this document offers a hyperbolized polemic against the prevailing habitus of enlightenment theology, which accorded the logos of scripture more authority than its underlying ethos. Lessing's *Erziehung* only provokes further confusion on the question of poetry's relation to history. In sections §43–§47, for example, he portrays the historico-mythical status of miracles and prophecies as primers that prepare the way for more rational concepts of religion, thereby rendering the old primers obsolete. Yet his

aesthetic arrangement of biblical history into a narrative of progress shows him to be both an excellent *and* creative historian insofar as he translates the contingent Begebenheiten [occurrences] of history into a unified Handlung [action] attesting to the gradual perfection of humanity.[428] The fact that Lessing was forced to theologize from a poetic platform (after his publishing rights had been rescinded by the Duke of Braunschweig) also brings no clarity to our question. In short, Lessing's theology does not offer a definitive statement about how poetry and aesthetics relate to biblical history and religion. Readers of Lessing must either attempt to synthesize the various flashes of insight into an eclectic statement on the issue, or, as I have suggested at times, claim that an argument is at work on a performative or formal level.

Novalis was so drawn to this ambiguity within Lessing's work that it became a recurring subject throughout his writings, especially in his *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* (1800) and *Die Christenheit oder Europa* (1799), on which there will be occasion to reflect shortly. His goal was not simply to reject the rationalist architecture of Lessing's theory of religious education, but to amplify it by according the poetic or intuitive moment of religious education much greater significance. This, Novalis argued, was central to his entire philosophy: "Die Poësie ist das ächt absolut Reelle. Dies ist der Kern meiner Philosophie. Je poëtischer, je wahrer"[429] [Poetry is the

[428] See Lessing's *Erziehung* §92: "Du hast auf deinem ewigen Wege so viel mitzunehmen! so viel Seitenschritte zu tun!—Und wie? wenn es nun gar so gut als ausgemacht wäre, daß das große langsame Rad, welches das Geschlecht seiner Vollkommenheit näher bringt, nur durch kleinere schnellere Räder in Bewegung gesetzt würde, deren jedes sein Einzelnes eben dahin liefert?" [You have so much to take with you on your eternal way! So many diversions to make! And what if it were as good as certain that the great, slow-moving wheel which brings the [human] race closer to its perfection is only set in motion by smaller, faster wheels, each of which makes its own contribution to this end?]. Lessing, Gotthold Ephraim. *Werke 1754–1757*. Band 3. Hrsg. von Conrad Wiedemann unter Mitwirkung von Wilfried Barner und Jürgen Stenzel. Deutsche Klassiker Verlag: Frankfurt am Main, 2003. p. 615–16.

[429] Novalis. *Schriften*. Historisch-Kritische Ausgabe, ed. Paul Kluckhohn, Richard Samuel, Hans-Joachim Mähl and Gerhard Schulz. 5 vols. Stuttgart, 1960. vol. 2, no. 473. Translation mine.

truly real. This is the core of my philosophy. The more poetic, the truer]. For Novalis "poetry is the truly real" and not just an unwelcome guest in scientific discourses, because he saw it as essential for any kind of knowledge production, including historical knowledge. Consequently, Novalis considered poetry to be a resource capable of reconciling contradictions and disagreements that afflict human reason such as the divide between Glaube [faith] and Wissen [knowledge],[430] asserting that "[d]ie Poesie heilt die Wunden, die der Verstand schlägt"[431] [Poetry heals the wounds that reason makes]. The disjuncture between the "ideal" (poetry) and the "real" (history) was not a source of skepticism or despair for Novalis; rather, he saw it as a motor for human exploration and discovery. This much is clear from the initial observation of his *Vermischte Bemerkungen* (1798), a text that develops multiple themes related to the subjects of religion, Bildung, and historiography which will be helpful to consider before investigating his *Die Christenheit oder Europa* and *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*.

In his first observation Novalis asserts, "Wir *suchen* überall das Unbedingte und *finden* immer nur Dinge"[432] [We *search* everywhere for the absolute, but always *find* only things]. The fact that the absolute cannot be pinned down is not what Novalis decides to emphasize; rather, he stresses the activities of "searching" and "finding," which are more significant than actually grasping the absolute—an attitude he ultimately shares with Lessing. For Novalis, searching and finding constitute the inner, spiritual activities of the subject, whose interest becomes heightened

[430] For an account of the unifying function of romantic art see Tzvetan Todorov's chapter on "The Romantic Crisis" in his *Theory of the Symbol* Trans. Catherine Porter. Cornell University Press: Ithaca NY, 1977. p 184–89.
[431] Novalis. *Schriften*. Historisch-Kritische Ausgabe, ed. Paul Kluckhohn, Richard Samuel, Hans-Joachim Mähl and Gerhard Schulz. 5 vols. Stuttgart, 1960. vol. 2, no. 473. Translation mine.
[432] Ibid., vol. 2, no. 1

by the indeterminacy of the absolute. Similar to Lessing, the subject's spiritual activity only manifests inadequate representations of the absolute,[433] which Novalis vividly describes in his second observation: "Vier Buchstaben bezeichnen mir Gott—einige Striche eine Million Dinge. Wie leicht wird hier die Handhabung des Universi! Wie anschaulich die Konzentrizität der Geisterwelt!"[434] [Three letters signify God to me—a few letters point to a million things. How easy it is then to make use of the universe! How visible is the concentricity of the spiritual world!]. The letters G-O-D are just abstract phonemes that in no way represent the full significance of the absolute, yet these letters do have the capacity to index "a million other things." The image of a million concentric circles—each one a concrete manifestation of spirit—expanding outward from a point of absolute indeterminacy hangs tremendous value on the evocative power of obscurity.

However, unlike Lessing, Novalis is unwilling to trade in that obscurity for a telos that limits the subject's spiritual activity to fulfilling the imperatives of reason. Such a telos binds the activity of spirit to a utilitarian model of development that is still governed by categories of clarity, perfection, and imperfection.[435] In the case of Lessing's *Erziehung*, reason illuminates with increasing clarity the path towards greater perfection (of religious concepts), which is to say, the path towards the new eternal gospel in which reason discovers that it no longer needs to be morally

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[433] See Frank, Manfred, *"Unendliche Annäherung": die Anfänge der philosophischen Frühromantik*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1997; and Lacoue-Labarthe, Phillippe and Nancy, Jean-Luc, *The Literary Absolute: The Theory of Literature in German Romanticism*. New York: State University of New York Press, 1988.

[434] Novalis. *Schriften*. Historisch-Kritische Ausgabe, ed. Paul Kluckhohn, Richard Samuel, Hans-Joachim Mähl and Gerhard Schulz. 5 vols. Stuttgart, 1960. vol. 2, no. 2.

[435] See Lessing's *Erziehung* §47: "In solchen Vorübungen, Anspielungen, Fingerzeigen besteht die *positive* Vollkommenheit eines Elementarbuchs; so wie die oben erwähnte Eigenschaft, daß es den Weg zu den noch zurückgehaltenen Wahrheiten nicht erschwere, oder versperre, die *negative* Vollkommenheit desselben war" [Such preparatory exercises, allusions, and pointers constitute the positive perfection of a primer, just as the above-mentioned quality of not blocking or rendering more difficult the way to those truths which are still withheld was its negative perfection].

incentivized by a system of rewards and punishments—that salvation can be a *lived* experience. Novalis, by contrast, wants the activities of spirit to be completely free; not just searching for outward "signs" capable of sweeping the particularities of disparate histories into a universalizing narrative—he also wants to include a mode of searching that turns inward: "Wir träumen von Reisen durch das Weltall—Ist denn das Weltall nicht *in uns*? Die Tiefen unseres Geistes kennen wir nicht—nach Innen geht der geheimnißvolle Weg. In uns, oder nirgends ist die Ewigkeit mit ihren Welten—die Vergangenheit und Zukunft"[436] [We dream of travelling through the universe—but is not the universe within *ourselves*? The depths of our spirit are unknown to us—the mysterious way leads inwards. Eternity with its worlds—the past and future—is in ourselves or nowhere]. The "mysterious" path inward is, I will argue, crucial for understanding the theological significance of Novalis' work, which addresses the problem of modernity's spiritual blindness by internally appropriating the often obscure, outward signs of biblical history (e.g. miracles and prophecies) to advance a process of self-discovery oriented more towards creation and synthesis than perfection. In this way, Novalis internalizes rather than secularizes the miracles and prophecies of religion, which deism (for instance) wanted to banish from modern faith altogether.[437] As a result, confessions of faith begin to represent outward expressions of an inner miracle. In a later fragment, Novalis provides evidence of this when he asks:

[436] Novalis. *Schriften*. Historisch-Kritische Ausgabe, ed. Paul Kluckhohn, Richard Samuel, Hans-Joachim Mähl and Gerhard Schulz. 5 vols. Stuttgart, 1960. vol. 2 no. 17. Translation mine.

[437] Here I have in mind Schmitt's *Political Theology*, which understands the relation between religion and modernity exclusively in terms of secularization. He writes, for example, that "the idea of the modern constitutional state triumphed together with deism, a theology and metaphysics that banished the miracle from the world. This theology and metaphysics rejected not only the transgression of the laws of nature through an exception brought about by direct intervention, as is found in the idea of a miracle, but also the sovereign's direct intervention in a valid legal order" (p. 36–37). Schmitt, Carl. *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*. University of Chicago Press, 2005.

> Können Wundern Überzeugung wirken? Oder wäre nicht wahrhafte Überzeugung, diese höchste Funktion unsers Gemüts und unsrer Personalität, das einzige, wahre, Gott verkündende Wunder? Jedes Wunder muß isoliert in uns bleiben, unverknüpft mit unserem übrigen Bewußtsein, ein Traum. Aber eine innige moralische Überzeugung, eine göttliche Anschauung, dies wäre ein reales bleibendes Wunder.[438]
>
> [Can miracles bring about conviction? Or would true conviction, this highest function of our mind and our personality, be the only, true, God-proclaiming miracle? Every miracle must remain isolated within us, unconnected from the rest of our consciousness, a dream. But an intense moral conviction, a divine attitude, this would be a real lasting miracle.]

Novalis' underlying question is what causes true conviction: the outward miracles recorded in biblical history or an individual's own spiritual engagement with those miracles? In the end, Novalis describes "intense moral conviction" as a true miracle, noting that they remain isolated dreams which have not yet been integrated into "the rest of our consciousness." Much of Novalis' religious writings are concerned with vividly representing the internal significance of miracles so that they will become integrated into human consciousness and ideally play a role in ethical life.[439] In contrast to Lessing, who treated miracles and prophecies as "primers" that can eventually be dispensed with, Novalis treats them as essential for the creation of new "miracles" and "prophecies" that will become relevant for modern faith.

Novalis did not make too many explicit statements against Lessing. However, of the few scattered comments he did make, none expresses more clearly his critique of Lessing than the

[438] Novalis. *Schriften*. Historisch-Kritische Ausgabe, ed. Paul Kluckhohn, Richard Samuel, Hans-Joachim Mähl and Gerhard Schulz. 5 vols. Stuttgart, 1960. vol. 2, no. 341.
[439] Novalis acknowledges the interplay between poetry, religion, and ethics writing: "Poesie ist die Basis der Gesellschaft, wie Tugend die Basis des Staats. Religion ist eine Mischung von Poesie und Tugend." Novalis. *Werke, Tagebücher und Briefe Friedrich von Hardenbergs*. Hrsg. von Hans-Joachim Mähl und Richard Samuel. Carl Hanser Verlag: München, 2005. Band II, p. 323.

following fragment: "Lessing sah zu scharf und verlor darüber das Gefühl des undeutlichen Ganzen, die magische Anschauung der Gegenstände zusammen in mannichfacher Erleuchtung und Verdunklung"[440] [Lessing saw too sharply and lost the feeling for the indistinct whole, the magical intuition of objects together in their manifold brightness and obscurity]. Lessing, it would seem, made so many concessions to rationalism that, in the end, intuition and feeling were pushed to the margins of his thought. In response to Lessing's allegedly myopic acumen, Novalis ventured to reintegrate the sensuous or intuitive dimension of Lessing's thought into a more expansive theory of education. His efforts can be detected (again) in the *Vermischte Bemerkungen* in which the theme of religious education is explored. For example, he argued that "intermediaries" were needed to obtain a connection with God, claiming that "nichts ist zur wahren Religiosität unentbehrlicher als ein Mittelglied—das uns mit der Gottheit verbindet […] In der Wahl dieses Mittelglieds muss der Mensch durchaus frei sein"[441] [nothing is more indispensable for true religiosity than an intermediary—which connects us to the godhead (…) The human being must be wholly free in choosing an intermediary]. Whereas Lessing accorded the faculty of reason exclusive rights as the intermediary of individual religious education[442], Novalis called for more options. His use of the term "Religiosität" untethers religion from any single institution or set of doctrines that might assume a mediating role, a detail that invites wider possibilities in terms of

[440] Novalis. *Schriften*. Historisch-Kritische Ausgabe, ed. Paul Kluckhohn, Richard Samuel, Hans-Joachim Mähl and Gerhard Schulz. 5 vols. Stuttgart, 1960. vol. 3, no. 34. Translation mine.
[441] Ibid., vol. 2, no. 73.
[442] In the second paragraph of his *Erziehung* he writes: "Erziehung ist Offenbarung, die dem einzelnen Menschen geschieht: und Offenbarung ist Erziehung, die dem Menschengeschlecte geschehen ist, und noch geschieht. [Education is revelation imparted to he individual; and revelation is education which has been, and still is, imparted to the human race]. Lessing, Gotthold Ephraim. *Werke und Briefe: In Zwölf Bänden*. Band 10. Hrsg. Von Arno Schilson und Axel Schmitt. Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1985. p. 75.

what has the power to occasion religious experience. In fact, Novalis fully embraced Spinoza's pantheistic worldview which identifies god with nature, taking the latter as a mode of the divine,[443] even referring to Spinozism as "eine Übersättigung mit Gottheit"[444] [a supersaturation with the divine]. Also, that human beings be "wholly free" to choose the intermediary that best connects them with "true religiosity" grants far more autonomy to the religious subject than had previously been envisaged in the history of Protestant theology. According to Novalis, without an intermediary—which can be "everything,"[445] any person or "any object"[446]—"der Mensch [kann] schlechterdings nicht mit derselben [Gottheit] in Verhältnis stehn"[447] [the human being simply cannot stand in a relation with the godhead]. Thus, intermediaries are "instruments of the godhead" that are needed to make "the spirit of the people visible."[448]

Central to Novalis' theory of religious education, then, is how intermediaries yield images

[443] In his *Ethics,* Spinoza writes "Whatever is, is in God, and nothing can be or be conceived without God." See Spinoza, Benedictus de. *A Spinoza Reader: The Ethics and Other Works*. Edited by E. M. Curley, Princeton University Press, 1994, p. 94. For a general account of Spinoza and pantheism in the context of German Enlightenment and Early German Romanticism see Friedrich Beiser's *The Fate of Reason*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987, and *The Romantic Imperative: The Concept of Early German Romanticism*, Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003.
[444] Novalis. *Schriften*. Historisch-Kritische Ausgabe, ed. Paul Kluckhohn, Richard Samuel, Hans-Joachim Mähl and Gerhard Schulz. 5 vols. Stuttgart, 1960. vol. 2, no. 356.
[445] In the context of the *Vermischte Bemerkungen*, Novalis uses the idea of pantheism to support this claim: "Ich bediene mich hier einer Lizenz—indem ich Pantheism nicht im gewöhlichen Sinn nehme—sondern darunter die Idee verstehe—dass alles Organ der Gottheit—Mittler sein könne…" [I am allowing myself some licence here—in that I am taking pantheism not in the usual sense—but understand by it the idea—that everything could be an instrument of the godhead—could be a mediator…] (no. 73). In the "Vierte Handschriften Gruppe" of his *Fichte Studien*, Novalis asks "Was ist glauben? All—Weltall" [What is faith? Everything, the cosmos] (no. 493). He later describes faith as the "sensation of knowledge" (no. 503).
[446] In no. 73 of Novalis' *Vermischte Bemerkungen*, he writes: "Jeder Gegenstand kann dem Religiösen ein Tempel im Sinn der Auguren sein" [Every object can be a temple for the religious person, in the sense of the augurs].
[447] Ibid., vol. 2, no. 73. Translation mine.
[448] Ibid., vol. 2, no. 75.

or poetic visions[449] that provide limited, yet vivid access to the absolute or "the godhead." I will say more about the theological significance of the image in relation to the history of Lutheranism when discussing *Die Christenheit oder Europa*, but for now I wish to point out that Novalis' insistence on the image conjures up the figure of Doubting Thomas, whose religious education depended exclusively on intuition (both haptic and visual). While Novalis does not exclude the plastic arts from acting as intermediaries,[450] it is far more likely that he means poetic images, which are not concerned with perceptual experience in any strict sense, but rather with images that result from the spiritual activity of the individual (after encountering an intermediary). In other words, images that are produced in the mind's eye or "mental images."[451] Novalis' desire for images brings him closer to Klopstock than Lessing insofar as he too is interested in poetically amplifying religious history to inspire greater faith, though his approach to scripture seeks to retrieve material that engages the reader's eye rather than ear.[452] Nevertheless both Klopstock and Novalis wish to expand modernity's knowledge of religion by means of intuition.[453] By contrast, Lessing's concept

[449] Géza von Molnár's *Romantic Vision, Ethical Context: Novalis and Artistic Autonomy* discusses the status of poetic vision in his book (though mostly in passing). Surprisingly, Lessing is not mentioned once in this monograph, which takes Fichte, Kant, and Schiller as Novalis' primary interlocutors.
[450] For an account of how Caspar David Friedrich's paintings were able to "mediate a religious experience" in accordance with Novalis' theory, see: Koerner, Joseph Leo, *Caspar David Friedrich and the Subject of Landscape*, 2nd edition, Reaktion Books, 2009, p. 22. (See parts I/II especially).
[451] For a study on mental images see Mitchell, W.J.T. *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology*. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1986. pp.14-31.
[452] Klopstock's *Der Messias* was intended to be heard in order to achieve the full range of its effects. See Klaus Weimar's "Reading for Feeling" in Wellbery, David E., et al. *A New History of German Literature*. Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004. p. 357.
[453] With respect to Klopstock, Joachim Jacob makes a similar observation: "Die Erweiterung der Vorstellungskraft und das Interesse an anschaulicher Erkenntnis, die sich der *Heiligen Poesie* als wesentliche Motive zuschreiben lassen, berühren sich nicht zufällig mit dem Grundgedanken der sich gleichzeitig formierenden philosophischen Ästhetik" [It is no coincidence that the expansion of the powers of imagination and the interest in intuitive knowledge, which can be ascribed to sacred poetry as essential motifs, coincide with the basic idea of philosophical aesthetics that was developing at the time]. Jacob, Joachim. *Heilige Poesie: zu einem literarischen Modell bei Pyra, Klopstock und Wieland*. M.

of the "Fingerzeige" [signs] downplays the need for images insofar as each "sign" reveals to humanity a more abstract way of cognizing religious truths. This is especially apparent when Lessing compares the religious education of ancient Hebrews and Christians, in which he claimed that the former needed "immediate punishments and rewards of a sensuous kind" (16) to grasp the Word of God (i.e. to obey God's commandments).[454] According to Lessing, the ancient Hebrews' need for a "sensuous" or intuitive system of rewards and punishments was so great that their "vision did not yet extend beyond this life." Thus, the Christian doctrine of eternal salvation—which Lessing understood as a more abstract, rational cognition of a religious truth[455]–was closed off to the ancient Hebrews. In short, the narrative trajectory of Lessing's *Erziehung* points to a subtle iconoclasm.[456] The "Fingerzeige," which Lessing speaks of in his preface, guide the traveller of the preface further away from the image, towards the "Unsichtbare Loge" [invisible church] of Freemasonry that Lessing describes in his short, dialogical text *Ernst und Falk*.[457] Yet the closing epigrams of Lessing's *Erziehung* (§92–§100) ambiguously authorize a certain kind of nostalgia that humanity can have towards its earlier, sensuous education: "Die Erinnerung meiner vorigen Zustände, würde mir nur einen schlechten Gebrauch des gegenwärtigen zu machen erlauben. Und was ich auf jetzt vergessen *muß*, habe ich denn das auf ewig vergessen[458]?" [The

Niemeyer, 1997. p. 3. Translation mine.

[454] See Lessing's *Erziehung*, §16.

[455] See Lessing's *Erziehung*, §17. Kenneth Calhoon makes a similar observation, finding that Lessing's earlier *Abhandlungen über die Fable* anticipates the structures found in his *Erziehung*. He writes, for example, that the "movement toward the self-sufficiency of reason characterizes the direction of both *Die Abhandlungen* and *Die Erziehung* and is commensurate with Lessing's conception of history." Calhoon, Kenneth, "The bible as Fable: History and Form in Lessing and Novalis," *Lessing Yearbook*, 1984, p. 56.

[456] I mean subtle in the sense that Lessing did not explicitly adopt a hostile attitude toward the image in any emphatic sense. His attitude toward images was perhaps consistent with Luther's, who believed that as long as they were no longer in the heart, they could do no harm when seen with the eyes. See Koerner, Joseph Leo. *The Reformation of the Image*. University of Chicago Press, 2008. p. 93.

[457] See Lessing's *Ernst und Falk* (Zweite Gespräch).

[458] Lessing, Gotthold Ephraim. *Werke und Briefe: In Zwölf Bänden*. Band 10. Hrsg. Von Arno Schilson und Axel Schmitt. Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1985. p. 99.

memory of my previous states would only permit me to make poor use of the present one. And does what I *must* forget for the present have to be forgotten forever?]. Statements like these inspired Novalis to build on Lessing's ideas, and on this particular question I will attempt to show that he answers with a resounding no. It is precisely these previous states that need to be prophetically repurposed, redeployed, and remembered so that new intermediaries can grow from the soil of old ones and make religion relevant for the present.

In another of Novalis' "vermischte Bemerkungen" [mixed observations] the historian emerges as the religious intermediary par excellence.[459] According to Novalis, "[Der Historiker] trägt ja Evangelien vor, denn die ganze Geschichte ist Evangelium"[460] [The historian presents gospels, because all of history is a gospel]. To view all of history as a gospel, which means "good news" or "good story," transforms the content of history into Heilsgeschichte [sacred history] and attributes a divine perspective to the historian, who situates the significance of singular occurrences within a larger narrative of redemption concerning the whole of human history.[461]

[459] Schleiermacher arrives at similar ideas in his *Über die Religion: Reden an die Gebildeten unter ihren Verächtern* (1799), as he writes: "Geschichte im eigentlichsten Sinn ist der höchste Gegenstand der Religion, mit ihr hebt sie an und endigt mit ihr—denn Weissagung ist in ihren Augen auch Geschichte und beides gar nicht voneinander zu unterscheiden—und alle wahre Geschichte hat überall zuerst einen religiösen Zweck gehabt und ist von religiösen Ideen ausgegangen. In ihrem Gebiet liegen dann auch die höchsten und erhabensten Anschauungen der Religion." Schleiermacher, Friedrich. *Über die Religion: Reden an die Gebildeten unter ihren Verächtern*. F. Meiner, 1958. p. 56. [History, in the most proper sense, is the highest object of religion. It begins and ends with religion—for in religion's eyes prophecy is also history, and the two are not to be distinguished from one another—and at all times all true history has first had a religious purpose and proceeded from religious ideas. In its realm, therefore, lies also the highest and most sublime intuitions of religion. Schleiermacher, Friedrich. *On Religion: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers*. Cambridge University Press, 1996. p. 42.

[460] Novalis. *Schriften*. Historisch-Kritische Ausgabe, ed. Paul Kluckhohn, Richard Samuel, Hans-Joachim Mähl and Gerhard Schulz. 5 vols. Stuttgart, 1960. vol. 3, no. 214, p. 586. Translation mine.

[461] F. Schlegel describes history as a point of intersection between the human and the divine: "Die Geschichte ist das Höchste, denn sie ist die Synthese der Gottheit und der Menschheit" [History is the highest because it is a synthesis of divinity and mankind]. Schlegel, Friedrich. *Friedrich Schlegel: Kritische Ausgabe seiner Werke: Fragment zur Poesie und Literatur, erste Teil*. Bd. 16. Hrsg. Von Hans

Consequently, this perspective invites suspiciously optimistic interpretations of history, which, earlier in the eighteenth century, became point of contention for Voltaire, who, in his *Candide*, created the figure Pangloss to satirize the philosophical system of optimism that Leibniz authorized. This debate stands in the background of Novalis' reflections on historical representation and, as I described in the first chapter of this study, Leibniz was responding to Bayle's *Historical and Critical Dictionary* (1697), a document that sent shockwaves through the Christian imaginary by claiming that "history is simply a collection of the crimes and misfortunes of the human race."[462] The scandal, of course, was that Bayle suggested God was complicit in these crimes by doing nothing to prevent them despite His omnipotent power to do so.[463] Leibniz, however, saw thing differently. In response to Bayle, he developed a very popular counter-narrative that emphasized the "good news" of history.[464] According to this narrative, all the individual crimes and misfortunes recorded in human history can be subsumed under the premise of a greater good, which makes "all the apparent deformities of our little world combine to become

Eichner. Ferdinand Schöningh Verlag: 1981. p. 292, no. 476.

[462] Bayle, Pierre. *Historical and Critical Dictionary: Selections*. "Manicheans." Translated by Richard H. Popkin, Indianapolis: Hackett, 1991. p. 147.

[463] An excellent source on the philosophical history of the theodicy question is Susan Nieman's recent book *Evil in Modern Thought: An Alternative History of Philosophy* (2015). Another source on the subject is Odo Marquard. His *Schwierigkeiten mit der Geschichtsphilosophie* (1982)*, Skepsis in der Moderne: Philosophisches Studien* (2007), and *Apologie des Zufälligen* (1986) trace the theodicy question to the emergence of the philosophy of history in the late eighteenth century.

[464] Many have cited Leibniz's *Theodicy* as a source of inspiration for Alexander Pope's poem *Essay on Man* (1734), which Lessing and Mendelssohn wrote about in an essay contest put on by the Preußische Akademie der Wissenschaften in 1755. The essay question asked the public to evaluate the line of Pope's essay that reads "Everything is good" and to compare the poem with Leibniz's *Theodicy.* Lessing and Mendelssohn's essay *Pope ein Metaphysiker!* anticipates some of the controversy with Goeze in terms of the relationship between poetic styles and philosophical/theological styles. Similar to his *Anti-Goeze* 2/8, Lessing writes: "Doch ein Dichter braucht nicht alle Zeit ein Dichter zu sein. Ich sehe keinen Widerspruch, daß er nicht auch ein Philosoph sein könne" [But a poet does not need to be a poet all the time, and I see no contradiction suggesting that he cannot also be a philosopher]. Translation mine.

beauties [and that] God, by a wonderful art, […] makes evil serve the greater good." Leibniz's theory of a greater good unfolds in three distinct ways. First, it functionalizes "evil" by making it appear as if it were necessary to actualize a greater good. Second, it represents "evil" as if it were compensation for "sins" previously committed.[465] Third, it attributes the presence of "evil" in the world to human freedom, which shifts the responsibility of its presence in the world back onto the shoulders of humanity. According to Leibniz, insofar as humans were designed with intelligence they are like "miniature Gods." "Man," Leibniz wrote, is "like a little god in his own world or *Microcosm*, which he governs after his own fashion: he sometimes performs wonders there and his art often imitates nature […] but he also commits great errors, because he abandons himself to the passions, and because God abandons him to his own way."[466] Once Leibniz deduced this optimistic metaphysics from human history, he even extended it to the book of nature, arguing that it holds true "not only in theology, but in nature as well, since a seed flung to the ground must suffer before it bears fruit."[467] Both Lessing and Novalis were equally won over by Leibniz's optimistic approach to history. From it they learned that the creative imagination plays an essential role in mediating historical knowledge, although in the case of Lessing's *Erziehung* the wings of the creative imagination appear bound to representing just the development of human reason across religious history, which, to use Lessing's own phrase against him, makes a "religion of reason."[468]

With this background in mind, I disagree with recent commentators who argue that the

[465] In his *Candide* (1759), Voltaire lampooned the first two of these propositions.
[466] Leibniz, Gottfried. *Theodicy: Essays on the Goodness of God, the Freedom of Man, and the Origin of Evil*. Open Court, 1998. p. 215–16.
[467] See Leibniz, G. W. *Leibniz: Philosophical Essays*. Translated by Roger Ariew and Daniel Garber, 1st edition, Hackett Publishing Company, 1989. p. 154.
[468] See Lessing's *Gegensätze*, or my Chapter 2, section 1.

only lesson Novalis learned from history was to "turn away from it."[469] To my mind, Novalis attempts to recuperate history not as proof, but as epic in order to show that it still plays a vital role in establishing a uniquely modern faith. Furthermore, in his *Die Christenheit oder Europa* Novalis explicitly "refers [his audience] to history" in order to break out of an eternally recurring, Sisyphean cycle of reformation and counter-reformation. Before getting into the finer points of *Die Christenheit oder Europa*, however, it is worth considering a few additional observations that Novalis makes with respect to the historian as an intermediary of religious conviction. Initially, Novalis claims, "poet priests" served as the preeminent intermediaries of religion, but they were eventually rendered obsolete once a "philistine" modernity entered the scene and transformed religion into an "opiate," conflating religious concepts with mundane human activities; for example, confusing the idea of heaven with "festivals, weddings, and balls."[470] The historian, however, is able to rise above bourgeois existence by vividly representing the remote past in ways that speak to both the "now" and also to an obscure future. In other words, the historian looks for what actually happened in the past, but presents that story in a way that foregrounds its living significance (i.e. grasping the meaning of the past in terms of the present). By moving from the strange (remote past) to the familiar (now) and then again to the strange (unknown future), Novalis'

[469] See O'Brien, Arctander William. *Novalis: Signs of Revolution*. Duke University Press, 1995. p. 240. I also take issue with O'Brien's characterization of Novalis as "irreligious" (p. 217), which he arrives at by way of Barth's chapter on Novalis in *Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century*, a text that describes Novalis as "dangerous" and "menacing." From the standpoint of the Church (i.e. Barth's standpoint) someone like Novalis might appear irreligious because of his unconventional approach to religion. However, I view Novalis as working alongside Lessing in trying to articulate a positive model of faith after historical proofs have been shown to be a poor source of religious conviction.

[470] Novalis. *Schriften*. Historisch-Kritische Ausgabe, ed. Paul Kluckhohn, Richard Samuel, Hans-Joachim Mähl and Gerhard Schulz. 5 vols. Stuttgart, 1960. vol. 3, no. 75, 76.

historian engages in a Romantic dialectic[471] that was arguably prefigured in Lessing's *Erziehung*. Novalis realized that if the internal coherence of the "stories themselves"—to borrow Lessing's phrase—is more essential to historical representation than proving the veracity of the facts, then the criteria by which history is judged comes closer to the work of art. Thus, for Novalis history is not just an object of knowledge for reason. It is also a beautiful object, molded by a quasi-divine hand working to bring unity to its otherwise sublime multiplicity:

> Der Geschichtsschreiber organisiert historische Wesen. Die Data der Geschichte sind die Masse, der der Geschichtsschreiber Form giebt—durch Belebung. Mithin steht auch die Geschichte unter den Grundsätzen der Belebung und Organisation überhaupt und bevor nicht diese Grundsätze da sind, giebt es auch keine ächten historischen Kunstgebilde—sondern nichts, als hie und da, Spurren zufälliger Belebungen, wo *unwillkürliches* Genie gewaltet hat.[472]
>
> [The historian organizes historical beings. The data of history is a mass that the historian shapes—giving it life. Thus history, too, is subject to the principles of life and organization, and, until these principles are in play, there can be no artistically formed images of history, only scattered traces of accidental life, in which *spontaneous* genius has prevailed.]

The Pygmalion fetish, which features prominently in Klopstock's theory of Darstellung—his idealized account of poetic representation[473]—finds expression in Novalis' views on the historian, who subjects history to "principles of life." To create "Kunstgebilde" [artistically formed images] from the essence of history requires a certain kind of genius, which involves identifying

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[471] "Indem ich dem Gemeinen einen hohen Sinn, dem Gewöhnlichen ein geheimnisvolles Ansehn, dem Bekannten die Würde des Unbekannten, dem Endlichen einen unendlichen Schein gebe, so romantisiere ich es" [By endowing the commonplace with a higher meaning, the ordinary with mysterious respect, the known with the dignity of the unknown, the finite with the appearance of the infinite, I am making it (the world) romantic]. Novalis, *Werke, Tagebücher und Briefe Friedrich von Hardenbergs*. Hrsg. von Hans-Joachim Mähl und Richard Samuel. Carl Hanser Verlag: München, 2005. Band II, p. 334.

[472] Ibid., vol. 2. no. 92. Translation mine.

[473] Klopstock's poem "Beschreibung und Darstellung" presents a distinction that will be pulled through his theoretical writings (e.g. *Zur Poetik* and *Von der Darstellung*). If a poet merely describes the image of Pygmalion, then it fails to come to life, whereas if a poet (re)presents [darstellt] it, then ekphrasis, viewed as a governing principle of art, has been achieved.

and organizing empirical data in a way that aspires to "bring history to life." Failing to do so means that the historian only (re)arranges the dead letters of history into a "monument" void of any living significance. Though difficult to prove from his correspondence or from explicit reference to Lessing in his works, I suspect that Novalis discovered—at least in part—these "principles of life" at work in Lessing's *Erziehung*, which offers a spiritual reading of biblical history consonant with Novalis' description of the historian. Like Lessing, Novalis also looks for a better means of judging biblical history than the law of contradiction, which, as noted in the previous chapter, still served as a guiding criterion for enlightenment theology. Against the law of contradiction, Novalis writes, "Den Satz des Widerspruchs zu vernichten ist vielleicht die höchste Aufgabe der höheren Logik"[474] [To negate the law of contradiction is perhaps the highest task of higher logic].

However, Lessing's critique of the "Bibliolatrie" that turned the Word of God into an idol left the theological letter/spirit distinction in a state of confused conflict—as if modernity should confess its faith solely upon the evidence of the spirit rather than the letter. Other than Lessing's vague reference to the inner truth of "the stories themselves" and pointing to the continued relevance of the Christian ethos throughout its history, he did not adequately explain how to make the truth of religion known by means of the spirit. From the *Erziehung* it appears that an advanced knowledge of history is needed, but if, as Lessing states in his defense of the Moravian Brotherhood, "der Mensch ward zum Tun und nicht zum Vernünfteln erschaffen"[475] [man was created for action and not for speculation], then he seems to betray the pietist tradition informing his theology. Novalis, by contrast, realized that poetry must "mix" with biblical history to make

[474] Novalis. *Werke, Tagebücher und Briefe Friedrich von Hardenbergs*. Hrsg. von Hans-Joachim Mähl und Richard Samuel. Carl Hanser Verlag: München, 2005. Band, II, no. 101, p. 767. Translation mine.
[475] See my Chapter 2, section 3 on pietism and Lessing's *Gedanken über die Herrnhuter* in Lessing, Gotthold Ephraim, *Werke in drei Bänden*, Hrsg. von Herbert Göpfert. DTV, 2003. p. 272.

the inner, spiritual evidence of religion *intuitively* accessible: "Über die heilige Geschichte überhaupt—ihre Poësie, ihre innre Evidenz. Wer hat die Bibel für geschlossen erklärt? Sollte die Bibel nicht noch im Wachsen begriffen seyn? Der Biblische Vortrag ist unendlich bunt—Geschichte, Poësie, alles durcheinander"[476] [About biblical history in general, its poetry, its inner evidence. Who declared the Bible closed? Should not the Bible still be growing? Biblical discourse is infinitely colorful: history, poetry, all mixed up]. In this passage, Novalis suggests that the spirit of religion dwells in the poetry of scripture and, as I will attempt to show presently, by further poeticizing (or romanticizing) biblical history he can mediate a more complete revelation of spirit. In other words, poetry becomes a source of "life," a way for biblical history renew itself "infinitely." In this sense, poetry is no longer just an aid to religion as it was for both Klopstock and Lessing; now it is called upon to save religion.[477] At the same time, Novalis acknowledges in his encyclopedia project, *Das Allgemeine Brouillon* (1798–99), that the idea of the bible can serve as the model for all books, since it allows the real (history) and the ideal (poetry) to perpetually cross-pollinate and bring forth new ideas: "Mein Buch soll eine scientifische Bibel werden—ein

[476] Novalis. *Werke, Tagebücher und Briefe Friedrich von Hardenbergs*. Hrsg. von Hans-Joachim Mähl und Richard Samuel. Carl Hanser Verlag: München, 2005. Band II, no. 97. p. 766. Translation mine.
[477] Schleiermacher reached a similar conclusion in his third speech in *Über die Religion*, which develops a nuptial language to describe the emergence of a new religion: "Sie [Religion und Kunst] zusammenzuleiten und in einem Bett zu einigen, das ist das Einzige was die Religion, auf dem Wege den wir gehen, zur Vollendung bringen kann, das wäre eine Begebenheit aus deren Schoß sie bald in einer neuen und herrlichen Gestalt bessern Zeiten entgegen gehen würde. Sehet da, das Ziel Eurer gegenwärtigen höchsten Anstrengung ist zugleich die Auferstehung der Religion!" Schleiermacher, Friedrich. *Über die Religion: Reden an die Gebildeten unter ihren Verächtern*. F. Meiner, 1958. p. 94–95. [To bring art and religion together and to unite them in one bed is the only thing that can bring religion to completion on the path on which we are headed; that would be an event from whose womb religion, soon in a new and splendid form, would face better times. Look there, the goal of your present highest endeavors is at the same time the resurrection of religion!]. Schleiermacher, Friedrich. *On Religion: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers*. Cambridge University Press, 1996. p. 69–70.

reales, und ideales Muster—und Keim aller Bücher"[478] [My book shall be a scientific Bible—a real and ideal model—and the seed of every book]. Here the dynamics are reversed. Now religion appears to supply poetry with a source of "life" by serving as the ideal model for all books, a gesture that brings the sacred and secular into a symbiotic relationship, both claiming a power to reveal knowledge.[479]

If the now poet-historian is in the business of revelation, then prophecy becomes part of the job description. The clearest expression of what the historian is charged to do emerges in fragment 123 of Novalis' *Vermischte Bemerkungen*, in which he articulates his conception of a "geistige Gegenwart" [spiritual present] that the historian poetically constructs by uniting memory and premonition:

> Nichts ist poetischer als Erinnerung und Ahndung oder Vorstellung der Zukunft. Die gewöhnliche Gegenwart verknüpft beide durch Beschränkung—es entstehe Kontiguität durch Erstarrung—Kristallisation. Es gibt aber eine geistige Gegenwart—die beide durch Auflösung identifiziert—und diese Mischung ist das Element, die Atmosphäre des Dichters. Nicht-Geist ist Stoff.[480]
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> [Nothing is more poetic than memory and premonition, or the conception of the future. The everyday present joins both of these together through limitation. Contiguity comes into being through atrophy—crystallization. But there is a spiritual present—which fuses them together through dissolving them—and this mixture is the element, the atmosphere of the poet. What is not spirit is matter.]

"What is not spirit is matter" becomes a familiar chorus across Novalis' writings and it indicates the failure to poetically synthesize disparities between inner, spiritual life and outward,

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[478] Novalis. *Werke, Tagebücher und Briefe Friedrich von Hardenbergs*. Hrsg. von Hans-Joachim Mähl und Richard Samuel. Carl Hanser Verlag: München, 2005. Band II, no. 557. p. 599. Translation mine.
[479] For recent scholarship that explores literature as a mode of revelation see William Franke's *Theology of Literature: The Bible as Revelation in the Tradition of the Humanities*, Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2017, and *The Revelation of Imagination: From Homer and the Bible through Virgil and Augustine to Dante*, Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern Univ. Press, 2015.
[480] Novalis. *Werke, Tagebücher und Briefe Friedrich von Hardenbergs*. Hrsg. von Hans-Joachim Mähl und Richard Samuel. Carl Hanser Verlag: München, 2005. Band II, no. 123. p. 282.

material existence. In the passage, the defining characteristic of the spiritual present is discontinuity; its ability to interrupt the natural flow of time experienced in terms of past, present, and future. In other words, Novalis' "spiritual present" is a historical concept promising to unify the three discrete temporalities into a single, vivid representation that, at least in the case of *Die Christenheit oder Europa*, aspires to serve as a regulative idea that conditions future reflection and action. In this way, the spiritual present is circumscribed by prophecy, though neither by fanatically negating the "sins" of the present for the sake of a future, nor by dogmatically renewing the authority of bygone traditions; rather, the spiritual present seeks to incorporate and redeploy the historical letter so that the present horizon of significance can be brought into view for the present.

Questions inevitably emerge from Novalis' idea of a "spiritual present." Perhaps the most obvious one can be posed by adopting a Marxist perspective that stands ready to accuse Novalis of legitimizing historical inaccuracy by authorizing fantastical represention of history, as if it were acceptable to disregard empirical facts for the sake of an idealized, poetic image of history. To my mind, this deploys a Marxist critique too hastily. Earlier, in his "mixed observation" 92 (cited above), Novalis implies that without the empirical data of history the historian would be left with no material to "shape" history, no object to endow with "life." Also, in the very next observation (93), Novalis confers to his "genius" historian the desire to cultivate a balance between a "subjective" and "objective" sense of history: "Beynah alles Genie war bisher einseitig—resultat einer kranckhaften Konstitution. Die Eine Klasse hatte zu viel äußern, die andere zu viel innern Sinn"[481] [Almost all genius up to now was one-sided—the result of a sickly constitution. One type had too much sense of the external, the other too much inner sense]. To assume that history could

[481] Novalis. *Werke, Tagebücher und Briefe Friedrich von Hardenbergs*. Hrsg. von Hans-Joachim Mähl und Richard Samuel. Carl Hanser Verlag: München, 2005. Band II, no. 93. p. 270. Translation mine.

objectively speak for itself is, of course, itself a form of ideology and Novalis' concept of history makes no pretensions toward that; in fact, quite the contrary, it is always the inner, spiritual (i.e. subjective) activity of the historian that brings unity to the multiplicity of historical phenomena. The "more serious" or difficult question, as one commentator described it, is whether or not historical judgments should be aestheticized in a way that makes the regulative ideal of a "spiritual present" appear as if they were constitutive of history.[482] Does this transform history into a fairytale? Does it, as Carl Schmitt feared, promote political indecision by making history a matter of aesthetic pleasure?[483] I will attempt to answers to these questions as I develop close readings of the father/son relationship in *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* and Novalis' attempt at constructing a "spiritual present" from the religious history of medieval Europe in his *Christenheit oder Europa*.

II. In Praise of Images: Novalis contra Lessing in *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*

Novalis' *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* (1802) begins with a description of the protagonist's parents, who "lagen schon und schliefen, [als] die Wanduhr schlug ihren einförmigen Takt" [already lay asleep in bed as the clock on the wall was ticking monotonously]. In the meantime, their son Heinrich "lag unruhig auf seinem Lager"[484] [lay restless in his bed], reflecting on a

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[482] See Saul, Nicholas. *History and Poetry in Novalis and in the Tradition of the German Enlightenment*. Bithell Series of Dissertations. Volume 8. Maney and Son, 1984. p. 80.

[483] On this subject, Schmitt writes: "What is perceived as romantic rationalism and intellectualism is this ironic deflation of the reality of the world into a fanciful construction. In this way, the two new realities—humanity and history—also became figures that could be manipulated […] It is almost comical that serious historians regard romanticism as the originator of the historical sense […] In the romantic, everything—society and history, the cosmos and humanity– serves only the productivity of the romantic ego." Schmitt, Carl, *Political Romanticism*. MIT Press, 1986. pp. 74–75.

[484] Novalis. *Werke, Tagebücher und Briefe Friedrich von Hardenbergs*. Hrsg. von Hans-Joachim Mähl und Richard Samuel. Carl Hanser Verlag: München, 2005. Band I, p. 240. English translation modified.

stranger's tale of a blue flower, while outside "vor den klappernden Fenstern sauste der Wind; abwechselnd würde die Stube hell von dem Schimmer des Mondes"[485] [the wind rattled the windows [and] from time to time the moon's glimmer lit up the room]. These opening lines of Novalis' unfinished Bildungsroman are deceptively straightforward. However, upon closer inspection the narrator establishes a subtle conflict between the parents and their child marked not only by the contrasting states of the characters (i.e. the slumbering parents and their restless son), but also by their different experiences of time. Whereas the parents' room fills with the mechanically measured tick-tock of the wall clock, Heinrich's is filled with punctuations of moonlight that ebb and flow as the wind spontaneously pushes away clouds. The descriptions present contrasting temporalities in which the parent's mechanized, linear experience of time registers as antithetical to Heinrich's natural, quasi-cyclical experience of it. These differing temporal perspectives help prepare the reader to understand how Heinrich and his father hold opposing views of history. As the first chapter progresses this generational conflict comes more sharply into focus and highlights, I will argue, several of the observations made in the previous section regarding the role of images in Novalis' theory of education, which culminates in a symbolic confrontation between Augsburg and Rome—the respective geographical centers of Protestantism and Catholicism. The first chapter supplies evidence that images, dreams, and visions are indispensable for Heinrich's education, thereby providing a perspective from which to understand the initial premises of the novel as a corrective against Lessing's assumption that human reason gradually replaces the need for a sensible, image-based faith.

Before I explore the father/son confrontation, I want to take a closer look at the opening scene to get a sense of how the novel builds up the significance of the dream-images that become

[485] Ibid., p. 240.

central to Heinrich's education. The stranger's tale of a blue flower appears to be the source of Heinrich's restlessness. It leads to the following confessional soliloquy: "'Nicht die Schätze sind es, die ein so unaussprechliches Verlangen in mir geweckt haben,' sagte er zu sich selbst; 'fern ab liegt mir alle Habsucht: aber die blaue Blume sehn ich mich zu erblicken. Sie liegt mir unaufhörlich im Sinn, und ich kann nichts anders dichten und denken'"[486] [It is not the treasures that have awakened such an inexpressible yearning in me, nothing is further from me than greed: but I do long to behold the blue flower. It is perpetually in my mind, and nothing else occupies my thought and imagination.] At the heart of Heinrich's reflection stands the distinction between beholding [erblicken] and possessing [Habsucht], in which the former is held in higher esteem because it functions as the point on which all of Heinrich's cognitive activity turns. Similar to what was found in Lessing's aesthetics, actually possessing the flower would terminate Heinrich's cognitive activity. Of course, it must be acknowledged that Heinrich's desire to see the blue flower is the result of him listening to a stranger's tale and not the result of him actually having seen it, which introduces another level of mediation. Thus, in order for Heinrich to see the object of his "inexpressible yearning" requires him to visualize the blue flower based on what he hears from the tale. In other words, to have access to the blue flower, Heinrich must become an image-maker himself.[487] The act of becoming an image-maker is best captured in Novalis' fragment *Über Goethe*, in which he assigns spirit the task of visualizing that which is not intuitively available,

[486] Novalis. *Werke, Tagebücher und Briefe Friedrich von Hardenbergs*. Hrsg. von Hans-Joachim Mähl und Richard Samuel. Carl Hanser Verlag: München, 2005. Band I, p. 240.
[487] For a theory on images providing access to the invisible or absolute see Freedberg, David, *The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response*, Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1989. See his chapter "Invisibilia per Visibilia," in which he describes legends from the thirteenth century as providing "abundant evidence for the use of images in meditational processes" (p. 168).

including the remote past. "Die Antike [wird], mit Händen gemacht. Der Geist bringt sie durch das Auge hervor—und der gehauene Stein ist nur der Körper, der erst durch sie Bedeutung erhält, und zur Erscheinung derselben wird[488]" [Antiquity is not made with hands. The spirit produces it through the eye—and the carved stone is only the body which first receives meaning through antiquity and becomes its appearance]. Thus, in order to "see" the past, spirit must conjure up a body, a letter, or a sensible form that makes the invisible both present and meaningful.

Saving Novalis' spiritual (re)construction of history for the next section, a more immediate question presents itself here: why should Heinrich, or anyone for that matter, trouble themselves with visualizing an image as seemingly trivial as a blue flower? In fact, this is Heinrich's initial response to his own experience, for he tells himself that he has likely been carried away by a dream, prompting him to reassert the primacy of the waking world: "denn in der Welt, in der ich sonst lebte, wer hätte da sich um Blumen bekümmert, und gar von einer so seltsamen Leidenshaft für eine Blume hab' ich damals nie gehört" [For in the world where I have always lived, who ever bothered about flowers? Such a strange passion for a flower is something I have never heard of before]. Yet following his initial doubts, Heinrich's curiosity reemerges with added urgency. He starts to wonder where the stranger came from; why none of the other listeners were as affected by the stranger's tale as he was; and what to make of his "wunderliche[r] Zustand" [strange condition]. Emerging from Heinrich's ruminations on the stranger's poetic tale—for it is, after all, poetry that produces his feelings of alienation[489]—are his "expectations" with respect to the blue

[488] Novalis. *Werke, Tagebücher und Briefe Friedrich von Hardenbergs*. Hrsg. von Hans-Joachim Mähl und Richard Samuel. Carl Hanser Verlag: München, 2005. Band II, p. 413.
[489] More specifically, Heinrich seems to have the fable in mind: "Ich hörte einst von alten Zeiten reden; wie da die Thiere und Bäume und Felsen mit den Menschen gesprochen hätten" [Once I heard tell of the days of old, how animals and trees and cliffs talked with people then]. Novalis. *Werke, Tagebücher und*

flower. Above all, it should signify something. As soon as he *believes* that the blue flower points to something beyond itself, the flower transcends its own apparent banality by familiarizing Heinrich with new ideas and perspectives: "Ich glaubte, ich wäre wahnsinnig, wenn ich nicht so klar und hell sähe und dächte, seitdem [ich die Blume erblickte,] ist mir alles viel bekannter"[490] [I believe I were mad if I did not see and think so clearly. Indeed, since seeing the blue flower everything is much more familiar to me]. It is only when Heinrich does not have the flower "recht gegenwärtig" [right before his mind's eye] that a "tiefes, inniges Treiben"[491] [deep inner turmoil] takes hold of him. Insofar as the significance of the blue flower eludes Heinrich, it becomes the point of departure for his spiritual odyssey, providing him with a provisional goal (i.e. to determine its meaning) and setting him on a journey of (self) discovery.

The start of that odyssey appears strikingly similar to the preface of Lessing's *Erziehung*. Here the traveller (Heinrich) searches for orientation not in the "unermessliche Ferne" [immeasurable distance], but rather in the "unabsehliche Ferne" [unforeseeable distance], a slight modification that foregrounds a problem of optics or perception rather than one of rational calculation. At first glance, Heinrich seems to confirm Lessing's assumption that rational concepts provide a better, more advanced mode of cognizing truth than sensuous images. He does this by contemplating whether a more robust command of abstract language would enable him to grasp the meaning of the stranger's tale better: "Es muß noch viel Worte geben, die ich nicht weiß: wüßte ich mehr, so könnte ich viel bessert alles begreifen"[492] [There must be many words I do not know;

Briefe Friedrich von Hardenbergs. Hrsg. von Hans-Joachim Mähl und Richard Samuel. Carl Hanser Verlag: München, 2005. Band I, p. 240.

[490] Novalis. *Werke, Tagebücher und Briefe Friedrich von Hardenbergs*. Hrsg. von Hans-Joachim Mähl und Richard Samuel. Carl Hanser Verlag: München, 2005. Band I, p. 240.

[491] Ibid.

[492] Ibid., p. 240–41.

if I knew more, I could grasp everything much better]. However, the narrator implies that the stranger's tale adheres to the conventions of the fable, which means that Heinrich should not need to take recourse to complex abstraction in order to grasp the meaning of the story: "Mir ist gerade so, als wollten sie [die Thiere, Bäume und Felsen] allaugenblicklich anfangen, und als könnte ich es ihnen ansehen, was sie mir sagen wollten"[493] [I feel just as though nature might start to talk any moment now and I could tell by the looks of the animals, trees, and cliffs what they wanted to say to me]. By referring to the fable, Novalis puts himself in dialogue with Lessing's earlier *Abhandlungen über die Fabel* (1759), which, over the course of five essays, develops a logic of progress similar to that found in his *Erziehung*.[494]

After criticizing a number of fabulists who prioritize allegory and ornament at the expense of simplicity,[495] Lessing defines the fable as a "Lehre von der anschauenden Erkenntnis"[496] [lesson of intuitive cognition]. The fabulist should be able to present general moral truths by narrating specific events, either imagined or historical.[497] The general moral truth of the fable, Lessing

[493] Ibid., p. 240.
[494] For scholarship on Lessing's theory of the fable, see Pritzner, John, "Lessing and the Fable," in Fischer, Barbara and Fox, Thomas C., *A Companion to the Works of Gotthold Ephraim Lessing*, New York: Camden House, 2005, pp. 89–105; Calhoon, Kenneth, "The Bible as Fable: History and Form in Lessing and Novalis." *Lessing Yearbook,* 1984. 55–78; and Wellbery, David. *Lessing's Laocoon: Semiotics and aesthetics in the Age of Reason*. Anglica Germanica Series 2. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984, pp. 183–203.
[495] Lessing expresses this most clearly when discussing Breitinger's theory of the fable, arguing: "die moralische Lehre [soll] in die Handlung weder *versteckt* noch *verkleidet*, sondern durch sie der *anschauenden Erkenntnis* fähig gemacht." Lessing, Gotthold Ephraim. *Werke und Briefe: 1758–1759*. Band IV. Hrsg. von Gunter E. Grimm. Deutsche Klassiker Verlag: Frankfurt am Main, 1997. p. 361.
[496] Ibid., p. 372.
[497] That fables should be based on real or imagined events was expressed through Lessing's reading of Aesop's fables. "Aesopus machte die meisten seiner Fabeln bei wirklichen Vorfällen. Seine Nachfolger haben sich dergleichen Vorfälle meistens erdichtet, oder auch wohl an ganz und gar keinen Vorfall, sondern bloß an diese oder jene allgemeine Wahrheit, bei Verfertigung der ihrigen, gedacht. Diese begnügten sich folglich, die allgemeine Wahrheit, durch die erdichtete Geschichte ihrer Fabel, erläutert zu haben; wenn jener noch über dieses, die Ähnlichkeit seiner erdichteten Geschichte mit dem

argues, “existiert nur in dem Besonderen, und kann nur in dem Besonderen anschauend erkannt werden” [exists only in the particular and can only be intuitively cognized in the particular]. Thus, the fabulist localizes general truths by working backward; transforming broad moral postulates into particular instantiations that are placed “sogleich in die Augen”[498] [immediately before the eyes of the audience]. Lessing is quite emphatic about readers being able to immediately grasp the moral of the fable, demanding that “es muß gar keine Mühe kosten, die Lehre in der Fabel zu erkennen”[499] [it must not require any effort to cognize the truth of the fable]. Thus Lessing and Novalis appear to be in agreement on the need for fables to aspire towards intuitive clarity.

However, disagreements begin to emerge as soon as Lessing describes the “heuristic use” of the fable.[500] Here, it becomes apparent that grasping the intuitive clarity of the fable is merely an exercise to prepare pupils for a more advanced form of cognition, which Lessing calls “symbolische Erkenntnis” [symbolic cognition]. Unlike intuitive cognition, symbolic cognition does not require particular examples to comprehend general truths; instead it can grasp them discursively by evaluating the arbitrary signs of language. Thus, the fable is pulled in two directions. On the one hand, the fable strives to make symbolic cognitions intuitively available for

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gegenwärtigen wirklichen Vorfalle faßlich machen, und zeigen mußte, daß aus beiden, so wohl aus der erdichteten Geschichte als dem wirklichen Vorfalle, sich eben dieselbe Wahrheit bereits ergebe, oder gewiß ergeben werde” [Aesop composed most of his fables according to actual occurrences: his successors have for the most part either invented such occurrences, or have merely been thinking not of any particular occurrence at all but of some general truth or other while producing their own fables. The latter, therefore, have contented themselves with explaining a general truth through the invented fable; while the former, in addition to this truth, had to show the similarity of the invented story to the real case before him, and that both the invented story and the true occurrence established or would establish the same truth]. Ibid., p. 345. Translation mine.

[498] Ibid., p. 346. Translation mine.

[499] Ibid., p. 360. Translation mine.

[500] See the essay titled “Von einem besondern Nutzen der Fabeln in den Schulen” [On the Special Use of Fables in Schools], in Lessing, Gotthold Ephraim. *Werke und Briefe: 1758–1759*. Band IV. Hrsg. von Gunter E. Grimm. Deutsche Klassiker Verlag: Frankfurt am Main, 1997. pp. 407–11.

readers. On the other hand, it prepares readers to reach a higher level of maturity or education so that they become less dependent on intuitive cognition for grasping general, abstract truths. In terms of Lessing's larger pedagogical agenda, he accords intuitive cognition a lower status than symbolic cognition—a hierarchy that fully embraces Wolffian rationalism.[501] This hierarchy becomes palpable through a sudden outburst at the end of Lessing's *Abhandlungen* essay, in which he asks: "Warum fehlt es in allen Wissenschaften und Künsten so sehr an Erfindern und selbstdenkenden Köpfen? Diese Frage wird am besten durch eine andre Frage beantwortet: Warum werden wir nicht besser erzogen?"[502] [Why is there such a lack of inventors and self-thinking minds in all the arts and sciences? This question is best answered by another question: why are we not better educated?]. When properly educated, the "self-thinker" no longer needs to intuitively cognize the lesson of the fable but can arrive at it autonomously by means of his own cognitive powers. Along these lines Lessing continues:

> Ein knabe […] den man angewöhnt, alles, was er täglich zu seinem kleinen Wissen hinzulernt, mit dem, was er gestern bereits wußte, in der Geschwindigkeit zu vergleichen, und Acht zu haben, ob er durch diese Vergleichung nicht von selbst auf Dinge kömmt, die ihm noch nicht gesagt worden; den man beständig aus einer Scienz in die andere hinüber läßt; den man lehret sich eben so leicht von dem Besondern zu dem Allgemeinen zu erheben, als von dem allgemeinen zu dem Besondern sich wieder herab zu lassen: der Knabe wird ein Genie *werden, oder man kann nichts in der Welt* werden.[503]
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> [A boy accustomed to compare at speed everything he learns today with what he already knew yesterday; who endeavors, by his own exertions, to obtain a knowledge of things which have not yet been taught him; who is constantly guided from one science to another; who is taught just as easily to ascend from the particular to the general, as to descend again from the general to the particular; such

[501] For a discussion on how Lessing's theory of the fable maps onto Wollfian rationalism see Calhoon, Kenneth. "The Bible as Fable: History and Form in Lessing and Novalis." *Lessing Yearbook*, 1984. p. 55.
[502] Ibid., p. 408. Translation mine.
[503] Ibid., p. 408. Translation mine.

a boy will either turn out a man of genius, or education has nothing to do with the formation of one.]

Thus, the self-sufficiency of reason (i.e. its ability to move freely between inductive and deductive modes of inquiry without taking recourse to intuitive cognition) serves not only as the primary goal of education, but it also becomes necessary for "obtaining knowledge of things not yet learned" (i.e. cultivating genius). From this standpoint intuitive cognition appears unable to produce new knowledge but is instead limited to aiding reason to grasp obscure premises. Most important in the context of this study, is that Lessing treats the simple form of the fable as a stepping stone toward the self-sufficiency of reason. The fable provides the pupil with an intuitive way to access general truths, yet it eventually becomes obsolete as soon as the mind is able to grasp the general truth independently. In this way, Lessing's developmental theory of the fable closely parallels the historical process described in his *Erziehung* in which faith gradually becomes less dependent upon intuitive or material mediation. This becomes a point of contention for Novalis.

Unlike Lessing, Novalis values intuitive clarity without thinking of it as simply a bridge to a "higher," discursive clarity. In fact, for Novalis religious education or knowledge production more generally requires embodied rather than disembodied processes, ones that involve material objects, pictures, dreams, texts, rhetorical speeches, and other media that make the spiritual or transcendent "worlds" of religion(s) manifestly present and intelligible. This tension between a material and immaterial approach to religious education has a much longer history than Protestantism,[504] yet it became a central debate within the Reformation and one that contributed to

[504] Art historians like Alain Besançon, David Freedberg, and Hans Belting (to name only a few) have

serious conflicts amongst reformers.[505] For example, the differences between Novalis and Lessing that I have been tracing call back to an earlier debate that Martin Luther had with a fellow reformer by the name of Andreas Karlstadt (1486–1541), who considered the presence of images in churches to be an affront to God's commandment against idolatry.[506] Luther, by contrast, developed a more neutral position, claiming that the charge of idolatry can only be properly applied if viewers mistakenly venerate the image (the material itself) rather than what the image refers to– a gesture that assigns blame to the person rather than the image.[507] In the end, Luther viewed images as "adiaphora," or things of which God neither commands nor forbids with respect to religious practices.[508] To my mind, Novalis comes closer to Luther than Lessing on this particular issue, although Novalis' attitude towards the role of images is far less neutral. In the context of Novalis' unfinished Bildungsroman, images are essential for Heinrich's religious education;

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explored this longer history in their works. See Besançon, Alain, *The Forbidden Image: An Intellectual History of Iconoclasm*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000; Freedberg, David, *The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989; and Belting, Hans, *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image before the Era of Art*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994.

[505] Koerner, Joseph Leo. *The Reformation of the Image*. University of Chicago Press, 2004. p. 94–168.

[506] Some Calvinists developed an even more extreme stance by charging artists who depicted religious scenes and figures from the past with violating the eighth commandment, which forbids bearing false witness. Ibid., p. 165–66.

[507] See Luther's *Against Heavenly Prophets in the Matter of Images and Sacraments*. Here Luther rejects the kind of iconophobia that Karlstadt advocates saying "I approached the task of destroying images by first tearing them out of the heart through God's Word and making them worthless and despised. This indeed took place before Dr. Karlstadt ever dreamed of destroying images. For when they are no longer in the heart, they can do no harm when seen with the eyes. But. Dr. Kalrstadt, who pays no attention to matters of the heart, has reversed the order by removing them from sight and leaving them in the heart." In Stjerna, Kirsi I., *The Annotated Luther, Volume 2: Word and Faith*. Annotated edition, Fortress Press, 2015. p. 55.

[508] See Luther's *Confessions of the Articles of faith: Against the Enemy of the Gospel and all Kinds of Heresies* (1528). Here Luther writes: "I regard images, bells, Eucharistic vestments, church ornaments, altar lights, and other such things as matters of indifference. Anyone who wishes may omit them. Images or pictures taken from the Scriptures and from good histories, however, I consider very useful but indifferent and optional. I do not agree with the iconoclasts." Ibid., p. 276.

without them he would never have experienced the "heavenly sensations flowing through his soul." In other words, images are not divested of power; rather they condition religious experience itself. For Novalis, the purpose of images starts to approximate the sixteenth-century mystic St. Ignatius of Loyola, who described "spiritual exercises," as a process in which the human mind visualizes saints, monuments, and relics to induce meditative states promising closer unity with God and also secret knowledge of His will.[509] The crucial difference between Novalis and earlier traditions like the one St. Ignatius belonged to, is that the image points to something wholly indeterminate, changing its status as an allegorical object or religious icon to a Romantic symbol.[510]

In the opening scene of *Heinrich von der Ofterdingen*, new images begin to proliferate and crystalize around the original image of the blue flower, which has an enchanting effect on Heinrich. This proliferation of images runs counter to the gradual dissolution of material mediation that, for Lessing, testifies to historical progress. Here, by contrast, we find the protagonist surrendering himself to the authority of the images he perceives, allowing them to guide him through the content of his dreams rather than placing all his confidence in human reason to impose an order (i.e. to act as sovereign mediator). In the following passage images become objects of desire, which demands a material relationship to the supernatural substrate of the blue flower:

[509] For example, in the prelude to Loyola's first spiritual exercise he writes, "When a contemplation or meditation is about something that can be gazed on, for example, a contemplation of Christ our Lord, who is visible, the composition consists of seeing in imagination the physical place. By physical place I mean, for instance, a temple or a mountain where Jesus Christ or Our Lady happens to be, in accordance with the topic I desire to contemplate." See Loyola, Ignatius of, *Ignatius of Loyola: Spiritual Exercises and Selected Works*. Edited by S. J. George E. Ganss, 1st edition, Paulist Press, 1991, p. 136.
[510] See Todorov, Tzvetan. *Theories of the Symbol*. Cornell University Press, 1982, especially pp. 198–221.

> Es dünkte ihn, als umflösse ihn eine Wolke des Abendroths; eine himmlische Empfindung überströmte sein Inneres; mit inniger Wollust strebten unzählbare Gedanken in ihm sich zu vermischen; neue, nie gesehene Bilder entstanden, die auch in einander flossen und zu sichtbaren Wesen um ihn wurden, und jede Welle des lieblichen Elements schmiegte sich wie ein zarter Busen an ihn. Die Flut schien eine Auflösung reizender Mädchen, die an dem Jünglinge sich augenblicklich verkörperten.[511]
>
> [It seemed as if a sunset cloud was enveloping him; a heavenly sensation flowed through his soul; with voluptuous delight countless thoughts strove to mingle within him. New images never seen before arose and interfused and became visible beings around him, and every wave of the lovely element clung to him like a tender bosom. The waves appeared to be charming girls dissolved, which momentarily embodied themselves as they touched the youth.]

That the images "cling" to Heinrich suggests that they represent more than a dispensable form or a vehicle serving merely to transport him to a more "enlightened" state of religious consciousness. Instead, the images become "visible beings" that generate, shape, and authenticate his belief in the supernatural power of the blue flower by engaging his perception. "Alle Empfindungen," the narrator writes, "stiegen bis zu einer niegekannten Höhe in ihm"[512] [every sensation mounted to hitherto unknown heights in him]. By letting himself be guided by these sensations, Heinrich "durchlebte ein unendlich buntes Leben; starb und kam wieder, liebte bis zur höchsten Leidenschaft, und war dann wieder auf ewig von seiner Geliebten getrennt"[513] [lived through an infinite variety of colorful experiences; he died and came to life again, loved most passionately, and was then separated from his loved one forever]. Standing in the background of these "colorful experiences" are a multiplicity of images that become "klarer und bleibender"

[511] Novalis. *Werke, Tagebücher und Briefe Friedrich von Hardenbergs*. Hrsg. von Hans-Joachim Mähl und Richard Samuel. Carl Hanser Verlag: München, 2005. Band I, p. 242.
[512] Ibid., p. 241.
[513] Ibid., p. 241.

[clearer and more abiding], rather than gradually less relevant. However, Heinrich is never in "possession" of the images; they constantly change into new forms that always assume sensible (and sensual) forms like waves appearing as "dissolved charming girls" who nevertheless have the power to "touch" him.[514]

I understand these details from the opening scene to set the stage for Heinrich's confrontation with his father, which I read as an imagined debate between Novalis and Lessing over the status of images in their respective theories of Bildung. The dialogue between Heinrich and his father begins shortly after he is awoken. "Du langschläfer" [late riser] is the first direct speech we hear from the father, whose hyperbolized industriousness anticipates Max Weber's arguments linking the ethics of Protestantism to the spirit of capitalism. *"*Wie lange sitze ich hier und feile," the father continues. "Ich habe deinetwegen nichts hämmern dürfen; die Mutter wollte den lieben Sohn schlafen Lassen"[515] [How long do I sit here and file. I was not allowed to hammer because your mother wanted to let her dear son sleep]. Heinrich asks his father not to get mad at his perceived laziness and eagerly tells him how his dream felt more significant than a random sequence of fleeting images; that the blue flower seemed "als sey es mehr als bloßer Traum gewesen" [as though it were more than mere dream]. The father then launches into a rather lengthy

[514] For recent materialist approaches to religious studies, see Meyer, Birgit, "An Author Meets Her Critics," *Religion and Society; New York*, vol. 5, no. 1, 2014, pp. 205–54; Gertsman, Elina, "Mater Matters," in Downes, Stephanie et al., ed., *Feeling Things: Objects and Emotions through History*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018, pp. 27–42; See also Arendt, Hannah, *Love and Saint Augustine*, ed. Joanna Vecchiarelli Scott and Judith Chelius Stark, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998. Arendt attempts to recover a "pre-theological" moment in St. Augustine's writings, which involves a notion of "craving" as the common denominator of both Christian Caritas and Greek Cupitas. The idea of "craving" foregrounds an expectation of a determinate, or material object in this context.

[515] Novalis. *Werke, Tagebücher und Briefe Friedrich von Hardenbergs*. Hrsg. von Hans-Joachim Mähl und Richard Samuel. Carl Hanser Verlag: München, 2005. Band I, p. 243.

monologue that reconstructs the rationalism informing Lessing's tripartite scheme of religious history, which progresses from a religion based on outward images and laws (Judaism), to a religion that establishes a spiritual, inner relationship to law (Christianity), and then finally to a religion that no longer needs a system of rewards and punishments to adhere to the law (the "new eternal gospel"). The telos of this history suggests that the general truths of the bible can eventually be grasped without any reference to their particular historical expression in the bible.[516] The father says:

> Träume sind Schäume, mögen auch die hochgelehrten Herren davon denken, was sie wollen, und du thust wohl, wenn du dein Gemüth von dergleichen unnützen und schädlichen Betrachtungen abwendest. Die Zeiten sind nicht mehr, wo zu den Träumen göttliche Gesichte sich gesellten, und wir können und werden es nicht begreifen, wie es jenen auserwählten Männern, von denen die Bibel erzählt, zu Muthe gewesen ist. Damals muß es eine andere Beschaffenheit mit den Träumen gehabt haben, so wie mit den menschlichen Dingen.[517]
>
> [Dreams are nothing but lies, whatever your learned men may think of them; and you would do better to turn your mind away from such useless and harmful reflections. The times are past when divine apparitions appeared in dreams, and we cannot and will not fathom the state of mind of those chosen men the Bible speaks of. The nature of dreams as well as of the world of men must have been different in those days.]

Heinrich's father rejects the idea that his son's dream carries any potential for revealing knowledge. Rather, he judges them to possess only a negative value since they distract the mind from performing its more industrious duties. He dismisses the necessity of prophecy altogether, claiming that the times in which dreams were considered a form of divine communication are long gone, and that the modern world is no longer governed by such superstition. Instead, the father

[516] See especially Lessing's *Erziehung* §85.
[517] Novalis. *Werke, Tagebücher und Briefe Friedrich von Hardenbergs*. Hrsg. von Hans-Joachim Mähl und Richard Samuel. Carl Hanser Verlag: München, 2005. Band I, p. 243.

believes society has progressed so much that the prophetic stories of the bible are no longer serviceable to practical life. He argues, "in dem Alter der Welt, wo wir leben, findet der unmittelbare Verkehr mit dem Himmel nicht mehr statt. Die alten Geschichten und Schriften sind jetzt die einzigen Quellen, durch die uns eine Kenntniß von der überirdischen Welt, so weit wir sie nöthig haben, zu theil wird"[518] [In the age we live in there is no longer any direct intercourse with heaven. The old stories and records make up our only source of knowledge, in so far as we need it, of the supernatural world]. Here the father describes his perspective in terms of a rupture between a modernity ordered by reason and earlier traditions that found orientation by means of the legends and myths contained in scripture—a prejudice that expects modernity to progress "from mythos to logos," as Blumenberg and Cassirer have discussed (differently) in their respective projects.[519] The father then ventriloquizes a central argument in Lessing's *Erziehung*, suggesting that reason no longer requires the prophetic mediation of dreams: "statt jener ausdrücklichen Offenbarungen redet jetzt der heilige Geist mittelbar durch den Verstand kluger und wohlgesinnter Männer und durch die Lebensweise und die Schicksale frommer Menschen zu uns"[520] [instead of those expressed revelations the holy spirit now speaks to us indirectly through the minds of wise and well-disposed men and through the customs and fates of the pious]. Central

[518] Ibid., p. 243.
[519] For a comparison between Blumenberg's *Work on Myth* and Cassirer's *Symbolic Forms*, see Robert Wallace's introduction to Blumenberg, Hans, *Work on Myth*, trans. Robert M. Wallace, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1988. Wallace makes the following observation: "While Blumenberg honors Cassirer's work on this problem (as on others), he has one fundamental criticism of Cassirer's theory: That he did not manage to overcome the unstated assumption that once science emerges, myth, despite its supposedly autonomous dignity as a "symbolic form," is fundamentally obsolete; that once the step "from mythos to logos" has been taken, it can only be perverse to, as it were, turn back" (p. viii).
[520] Novalis. *Werke, Tagebücher und Briefe Friedrich von Hardenbergs*. Hrsg. von Hans-Joachim Mähl und Richard Samuel. Carl Hanser Verlag: München, 2005. Band I, p. 243.

to the father's statement is the assumption that reason has taken over religious mediation for the modern world. He eventually goes on to strip the sensible forms (intuitions, images, miracles, prophecies) associated with revealed knowledge of all their edifying power: "Unser heutigen Wunderbilder haben mich nie sonderlich erbaut, und ich habe nie jene großen Thaten geglaubt, die unsre Geistlichen davon erzählen. Indeß mag sich daran erbauen, wer will, und ich hüte mich wohl jemanden in seinem Vertrauen irre zu machen"[521] [Our present-day miracle-working images have never edified me especially, and I have never believed the great deeds that our spiritual leaders attribute to them. However, anyone who wants to may derive edification from them, and I am careful not to make another stray from his faith]. These final words of the father's speech expose a paradox with respect to the status of tolerance in Lessing's religious thought. On the one hand, the father tolerates the different ways in which others arrive at their faith, claiming that he does not want to interfere in this process. On the other hand, he regards those who still need sensible forms to grasp religious truth as failing to catch up with the rest of the modern world. This prejudice is precisely what Novalis seeks to correct in his philosophy of religion.

Heinrich's response to his father points to significant differences between Lessing and Novalis. Their debate begins as soon as Heinrich asks: "Aber, lieber Vater, aus welchem Grunde seyd Ihr so den Träumen entgegen, deren seltsame Verwandlungen und leichte zarte Natur doch unser Nachdenken gewißlich rege machen müssen?"[522] [But father, what makes you so opposed to dreams? Their strange transformations and light, tender nature must certainly promote our reflections]. Here Heinrich challenges his father's assumption that dreams only yield "useless" and "harmful" reflections. For Heinrich, dreams represent a "Wunderbarkeit" [miraculous

[521] Ibid., p. 243.
[522] Ibid., p. 244.

phenomenon] not only because of their ability to influence thought and action, but also because of their ability to reveal knowledge about his inner experiences. In his words, they reveal "ein bedeutsamer Riss in den geheimnivollen Vorhang […] der mit tausend Falten in unser Inneres hereinfällt" [a significant rent in the mysterious curtain that hangs a thousandfold about our inner life]. This miraculous power of dreams appears to be rooted in their vivid particularities rather than in a general truth subsequently supplied by reason. From Heinrich's perspective, the vividness of dreams, which resist being pinned down by one master narrative, makes them better didactic instruments than general truths, or the symbolic mode of cognition that Lessing holds in such high esteem. This becomes clear from Heinrich's own dream analysis of the blue flower, in which he tells his father: "Gewiß ist der Traum, den ich heute Nacht träumte, kein unwirksamer Zufall in meinem Leben gewesen, denn ich fühle es, daß er in meine Seele wie ein weites Rad hineingreift, und sie in mächtigem Schwunge forttreibt" [Certainly the dream I dreamt last night will not have been an ineffectual accident in my life, for I feel that it reaches into my soul as into a giant wheel, compelling it onward with a mighty swing]. To Heinrich there is nothing "useless" about his dream insofar as it both compels him "onward" and reveals knowledge about his inner life, a perspective that invests the image with a power to mediate between inner and outer experience.[523]

Unlike his father, Heinrich also values dreams for their ability to break apart the monotony of routine life. He finds dreams to be "eine Schutzwehr gegen die Regelmäßigkeit und

[523] In his book *Caspar David Friedrich and the Subject of Landscape*, Joseph Koerner argues that Caspar David Friedrich introduces a confessional or reflexive dimension to Romantic painting that also serves as a means of mediating between inner and outer realities. According to Koerner, this established a new standard within Romantic landscape painting: "the whole of represented nature will appear as the picture of the artist's inner experience of self and world." Koerner, Joseph Leo, *Caspar David Friedrich and the Subject of Landscape*, 2nd ed., Reaktion, 2009, p. 89.

Gewöhnlichkeit des Lebens, eine freye Erholung der gebundenen Fantasie, wo sie alle Bilder des Lebens durcheinanderwirft und die beständige Ernsthaftigkeit des erwachsenen Menschen durch ein fröhliches Kinderspiel unterbricht"[524] [a defense against the regularity and monotony of life, a playground where the imagination is freed and revived and where it fuses together all the pictures of life and interrupts the constant soberness of grown-ups by means of a merry child's play]. In this instance, Heinrich's perspective on dreams comes much closer to Schiller's theory of aesthetic education than anything encountered in Lessing's *Erziehung*. Novalis, who studied under Schiller at Jena, seems especially influenced by his mentor if one considers the claim that dreams can reconcile the antagonism between the "soberness" of mature life and the playfulness of childhood, a dialectic that redescribes the dynamics of Schiller's "Formtrieb," "sinnliche Trieb," and "Spieltrieb" in which the latter synthesizes material and spiritual existence by producing a beautiful object or a "living form."[525] Above all, Heinrich seeks to establish a different relationship between dreams and waking life than his father; one that suggests the two need not be so radically (and asymmetrically) opposed and that the one can influence the other.

After responding to his father's critique of dreams, Heinrich's mother reminds the father that he too once had a profound dream during his adolescence that inspired him to propose to her at Augsburg. She asks the father if he remembers "daß du mir damals auch von einem Traume erzählest, den du in Rom gehabt hattest, und der dich zuerst auf den Gedanken gebracht, zu uns nach Augsburg zu kommen, und um mich zu werben?" [that you told me at that time about a dream

[524] Novalis. *Werke, Tagebücher und Briefe Friedrich von Hardenbergs*. Hrsg. von Hans-Joachim Mähl und Richard Samuel. Carl Hanser Verlag: München, 2005. Band I, p. 244.
[525] See Schiller, Friedrich, "Über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen," in *Sämtliche Werke in fünf Bänden*, dtv Verlagsgesellschaft, 2004, especially letter 15. For an excellent study on the relationship between Schiller and Novalis, see Saul, Nicholas. *History and Poetry in Novalis and in the Tradition of the German Enlightenment*. Institute of Germanic Studies, 1984.

you had in Rome, which put into your head to come to Augsburg and try for my hand?]. By naming Rome and Augsburg in the context of this debate involving dream images, Novalis alludes to a long and contentious history of iconoclasm that actually began in the eighth century and then reappeared during the reformation. In the earlier eighth century iconoclasm the Byzantine emperor Constantine V (718–775) prohibited the use of religious images because he believed the devil, "under the appearance of Christianity, had surreptitiously led humanity back to idolatry" by inhabiting icons.[526] At this time, iconoclasts siding with Constantine thought that icons "corrupted human intelligence by arousing shameful pleasures,"[527] and that the material used to construct them was incommensurable with the immaterial, divine spirit they sought to reference. The Roman Catholic Church challenged Constantine's policy on religious icons at the Second Council of Nicea (787), in which Church leaders fought to restore confidence in the use of images for the purpose of worship, arguing that the Byzantine iconoclasts were the only ones "surreptitiously" misleading people, and that both word and image harmoniously referred to the same "sacred" things. During the sixteenth century—which is of greater concern for this study—similar concerns to the ones Constantine expressed would be revisited by a number of reformers, who were generally divided over the question of what role images should play in religious worship.[528] Philipp Melanchthon

[526] See Besançon, Alain. *The Forbidden Image: An Intellectual History of Iconoclasm*. University of Chicago Press, 2000. p. 124. Besançon notes how the emperor proliferated his own images (on coins for example), while at the same time limiting the legitimate use of religious images to that of Christ; a discrepancy that is not without political motivations.
[527] Quoted in Besançon, Ibid., p. 123.
[528] See Alain Besançon's *The Forbidden Image* for a comparison between the iconoclasm of the eighth century and the iconoclasm during the Reformation. Besançon writes: "The destruction in 726 of the Christ of the Chalkitis, the image protecting Constantinople, placed above the Golden Gate of the imperial palace, can be compared to the posting of Luther's theses on the door of the Wittenberg Church: it had the value of a reformation." Ibid., p. 123.

(1497–1560), author of the Augsburg Confession (1530), wrote the following article on using images of Saints to facilitate worship:

> Of the worship of Saints they teach that the memory of saints may be set before our eyes, that we may follow their faith and good works, according to our calling, as the Emperor may follow the example of David in making war to drive away the Turk from his country; for both are kings. But Scripture teaches not the invocation of saints or to ask help of saints, since it sets before our eyes the one Christ as the Mediator, Propitiation, High Priest, and Intercessor.[529]

While the lives of saints might be useful to remember as particular examples of how to be faithful and how to perform "good" works, the Lutheran doctrine of *Solus Christus* holds that only Christ can act as the mediator in matters of human salvation and that these subordinate figures contribute nothing to that end. Much like the doctrine of *Sola Scriptura*, which reduced the number of sacred texts included in the canon to only the most essential, so too did Melanchthon's twenty-first article of the Augsburg Confession reduce the number of appropriate images that one could view while praying to just one: Christ.[530] The Roman Catholic Church responded to this article of the Augsburg Confession in the twenty-fifth session of the Council of Trent (1545–63), in which relics and images of saints were said to "instruct the faithful diligently in matters relating to the intercession," and that it was "good and beneficial to invoke [images of saints] and to have recourse to their prayers, assistance, and support in order to obtain favors from God through His Son."[531] So images of saints and the prayers associated with such images were seen more as aids and supplements for the purpose of religious worship than as a ruse devised by the devil. The Council

[529] Melanchthon, Philipp. *The Augsburg Confession*. Translated by Gerhard Friedrich Bente, CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2017, p. 32

[530] For more on how *Sola Scriptura* significantly reduces the scope of the biblical tradition that was made available for public consumption, see my Chapter 2, section 3, "excursus."

[531] Church, Fathers of the, *The Canons and Decrees of the Council Of Trent*, trans. Rev H. J. Schroeder, Rockford, Ill.: Tan Books, 2009, p. 218.

of Trent also celebrated the pedagogical benefits that images had for the illiterate, arguing that:

> by means of the stories of the mysteries of our redemption portrayed in paintings and other representations the people are instructed and confirmed in the articles of faith [and] all holy images [are profitable], not only because the people are thereby reminded of the benefits and gifts bestowed on them by Christ, but also because through the saints the miracles of God and salutary examples are set before the eyes of the faithful, so that they may give God thanks for those things, may fashion their own life and conduct in imitation of the saints and be moved to adore and love God and cultivate piety.[532]

As long as images could be instrumentalized to instruct and edify viewers, the council considered them to be of great value.

With this history of iconoclasm in mind, the stakes of the debate between Heinrich and his father increase dramatically. The father, who appears to be moderately sympathetic towards iconoclasm, reluctantly agrees to tell his story about a dream he once had in his youth. The father's dream has an uncanny similarity to Heinrich's. Prior to recounting the dream, Heinrich's father recalls the events of that day in which he was the guest of an old man from the country. The two discussed ancient poetry, sculpture, and painting until late in the evening. Like his son, the father was deeply impressed by the poetic manner in which the old man narrated his stories: "Noch jetzt heitert mein Herz sich auf, wenn ich mich des bunten Gewühls der wunderlichen Gedanken und Empfindungen erinnere, die mich in dieser Nacht erfüllten"[533] [Even to this day my heart cheers up whenever I recall the motley crowd of strange thoughts and feelings that filled me that night]. These strange thoughts and feelings made their way into the father's dream that night, which culminated in him being led by the old man from a cave to an open meadow containing many

[532] Ibid., 219.
[533] Novalis. *Werke, Tagebücher und Briefe Friedrich von Hardenbergs*. Hrsg. von Hans-Joachim Mähl und Richard Samuel. Carl Hanser Verlag: München, 2005. Band I, p. 246.

flowers, in which one was "especially pleasing" to him. The old man tells him "Du hast das Wunder der Welt gesehen […] Nimm wohl in Acht, was ich dir sage: wenn du am Tage Johannis gegen Abend wieder hieher kommst, und Gott herzlich um das Verständnis dieses Traumes bittest, so wird dir das höchste irdische Los zu Theil werden"[534] [You have seen the miracle of the world. Heed carefully what I tell you: if you come back here again towards evening on St. John's day and pray earnestly to God for the meaning of this dream, then the highest earthly lot will be yours]. In this context, citing John the Baptist, whose head was chopped off and brought to King Herod's court on a platter, is not without irony given the father's proclivity to rationally mediate all forms of revealed knowledge. But for a fleeting moment, the father experiences the transformative effect of poetic imagery: "Ich war darauf im Traume unter den herrlichsten Gestalten und Menschen, und unendliche Zeiten gaukelten mit mannichfaltigen Veränderungen vor meinen Augen vorüber. Wie gelöst war meine Zunge, und was ich sprach, klang wie Musik"[535] [After that dream I found myself among the most glorious shapes and people, and endless periods of time fluttered by in manifold changes. My tongue was as though set free, and my words had the ring of music]. In this passage history, conceived here as "endless periods of time" fluttering by, is emancipated from any singular telos, which the father describes in terms of a plurality of constantly changing historical and cultural experiences—an environment that opens up a space for the creative imaginative to freely play. Yet, rather than returning to visit the old man on Saint John's day to determine the meaning of his dream, the father quickly left Rome to travel to Augsburg, thinking that the dream was urging him to propose to Heinrich's mother. Immediately after his

[534] Ibid., 247.
[535] Ibid., 247.

transformative experience the father noted that "darauf ward alles wieder dunkel und eng und gewöhnlich; ich sah deine Mutter mit freundlichem, verschämten Blick vor mir; sie hielt ein glänzendes Kind in den Armen […]"[536] [Then everything became dark and confined and ordinary again. I saw your mother with an amiable, abashed look before me. She held a shining child in her arms…].

The potential for multiple meanings with respect to the father's dream is swiftly curtailed by a singular interpretation that reinforces the status quo of bourgeois family life. Instead of negotiating the meaning of the dream by praying "earnestly to God" and socially interacting with the old man, the father breaks his promise to return on St. John's Day and confidently hastens to Augsburg in order to actualize what he considered to be the dream's ultimate meaning: marriage and procreation. To my mind, Novalis uses this scene to emphasize how the father's dream experience quickly becomes disenchanting as soon as he reduces the diverse variety of images to just one meaning—a meaning that purges both inner and outer life of its poetic vitality. By juxtaposing Rome and Augsburg in the father's recollection, Novalis subtly throws his support behind the Roman Catholic Church vis-à-vis its stance on images, a position that would earn him a share of ridicule from his largely Protestant peers in the Jena circle. However, he leaves the Roman Catholic Church behind the moment he expresses a desire to transform religious images and history into symbols that can take on a life of their own independent of any religious affiliations. For Novalis, dream images and even historical narratives, insofar as they too present images of the past that assert authority over posterity, must retain an ability to generate multiple meanings and new experiences that promise alternative configurations of spiritual life. In his *Christenheit oder Europa*, Novalis develops a manifesto for reenchanting the history of

[536] Ibid., 247.

Christianity so that it can more adequately serve the changing spiritual needs of modernity. It is to this text that I now turn.

III. The Legibility of Spirit: Novalis' *Die Christenheit oder Europa* and the Question of Historical Mediation

> Alles, was wir erfahren ist eine *Mittheilung*. So ist die Welt in der That eine *Mittheilung*—Offenbarung des Geistes. Die Zeit ist nicht mehr, wo der Geist Gottes verständlich war. Der Sinn der Welt ist verlohren gegangen. Wir sind beym Buchstaben stehn geblieben. Wir haben das Erscheinende über der Erscheinung verlohren. Formularwesen[537]
>
> [Everything we experience is a *communication*. Thus the world is indeed a *communication*—a revelation of the spirit. The age has passed when the spirit of God could be understood. The meaning of the world is lost. We have stopped at the letter. As a result of the appearance we have lost that which is appearing. Formulary beings].
>
> —Novalis, *Vorarbeiten* 1798

Die Christenheit oder Europa was and is a controversial text. When Novalis first presented it as a speech, or rather a sermon, to members of the Jena Circle in November of 1799 it immediately sparked controversy. For instance, Goethe, while not himself a participant of the circle but still an authoritative voice for its members, strongly advised Friedrich Schlegel against publishing it in the *Anthenaeum* journal. Schleiermacher, who had just finished his treatise *Über die Religion*, found it too sympathetic towards the Catholic tradition, even accusing Novalis of being a papist. Schelling responded to the work with a satirical poem titled *Epikurisch*

[537] Novalis. *Werke, Tagebücher und Briefe Friedrich von Hardenbergs*. Hrsg. von Hans-Joachim Mähl und Richard Samuel. Carl Hanser Verlag: München, 2005. Band II, p. 383, no. 316.

Glaubensbekenntnis von Heinz Widerporstens (1799), which targets the religious writings of both Schleiermacher and Novalis for their insistence on a new religiosity that paradoxically calls for material mediation on the one hand, and spiritual or inner mediation on the other.[538] The most vocal dissenter, however, was Dorothy Schlegel. Her extreme antipathy towards Novalis himself compelled her to obstruct the publication of *Die Christenheit oder Europa* by any means necessary, which included appealing to her husband Friedrich and brother-in-law August to reject it. In fact, once she learned of Goethe's negative review of the work, Dorothy had the following to say in a letter to Schleiermacher: "Ich war gleich von vorne herein sehr dagegen, aber das war eine Stimme in der Wüste. Endlich wollte es [August] Wilhelm nicht ohne eine Note, die wollte Schelling nicht, Goethe ward zum Schiedsrichter genommen und der hat es ganz und gar verworfen! Vivat Goethe!"[539] [I was strongly against it from the beginning, but mine was a voice in the wilderness. Finally, [August] Wilhelm did not want to publish it without a note, Schelling did not want that, Goethe was called in to make the final decision, and he completely quashed it. Vivat Goethe!].

Beyond its immediate late-eighteenth-century context, *Die Christenheit oder Europa* continued to stir controversy. Its poetic idealization of the Medieval Christian world overlooks the divisiveness associated with both the Church's military campaigns against Byzantium and the

[538] Against material mediation, Schelling sarcastically writes: "Die Materie sei das einzig Wahre, / Unser aller Schutz und Rather, / Aller Dinge rechter Vater, / Alles Denkens Element, / Alles Wissens Anfang und End" [Matter is our only true, / omnipresent protector and counsellor, / All things proper, Father, / All thinking elements, / All knowledge from beginning to end]. And against spiritual, or inner mediation he writes: "Wie sie sprechen vom inner Licht, / Reden viel und beweisen nicht, / Füllen mit großen Worten die Ohren, / Ist weder gesotten noch gegohren" [How they speak of inner light, / speak much but do not prove much, / fill the ears with big words, / neither is boiled or formented]. Schelling, Friedrich. *Epikurisch Glaubensbekenntnis von Heinz Widerporstens*. In Muller, Andreas, *Satiren Und Parodien*. Reclam, 1935. p. 177–86.

[539] Briefe an Schleiermacher. December 9, 1799. Novalis. *Schriften*. Historisch-Kritische Ausgabe, ed. by Paul Kluckhohn, Richard Samuel, Hans-Joachim Mähl and Gerhard Schulz. 5 vols. Stuttgart, 1960. vol. 4, pp. 648–49. Translation mine.

Christian mission, which, even at its inception, chronicles a political rather than philanthropic agenda.[540] In his book *Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century* (1947), Karl Barth confirms this account of Novalis' disregard for historical accuracy, claiming: "far more important to [Novalis] than an assessment of the significance of exact research into the details of history is here once again the polemic against its 'degeneration,' against every study of history which is merely analytic, unphilosophic, unpoetic, and the [demand] that 'a student of history must also of necessity be a poet,' and the assertion that there is more truth in the fanciful tales of the poets than in the learned chronicles."[541] In his book *Political Romanticism* (1919), Carl Schmitt expressed outrage that the reception of *Die Christenheit oder Europa* archives serious political engagement with the essay, lamenting that "in its content, mood and cadence, the essay is a fairy tale. It is not an intellectual achievement, but rather a beautiful poetic fantasy […] But it is not treated as a fairy tale, and even today it is quoted with pedantic seriousness in the same breath as the utterances of responsible statesmen and philosophical thinkers and is given equal weight as proof."[542] At the very least, these problematic aspects of Novalis' poetic idealization of religious history should be acknowledged prior to any investigation into its potential value.

Die Christenheit oder Europa has also received more recent scholarly attention from Pauline Kleingeld, whose article "Romantic Cosmopolitanism: Novalis' Christianity or Europe"

[540] Jacob Taubes develops a similar reading in his *Political Theology of Paul*, arguing that Paul's letter to the Romans represents "a declaration of war." Taubes goes on to describe Paul's missionary work in Rome as a business trip that was taken "in order to obtain legitimation for himself," further claiming that "If someone brings along a decent sum [of money], then it's also a matter of legitimation, and not just philanthropy. Not philanthropy at all, but of legitimation." Taubes, Jacob. *The Political Theology of Paul*. Stanford University Press, 2004. pp. 13–21.
[541] Barth, Karl. *Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century: Its Background & History*. New ed., SCM, 2001, p. 342.
[542] Schmitt, Carl. *Political Romanticism*. MIT Press, 1986. p. 126.

(2008), for example, views this document as one of the clearest expressions of Novalis' broader philosophical commitments and argues that it develops a "version of the cosmopolitan ideal that is distinctly Romantic."[543] Central to Kleingeld's argument is how *Die Christenheit oder Europa* moves away from the cosmopolitanism represented in Kant's 1795 essay "Zum ewigen Frieden" [Perpetual Peace], claiming that Novalis found the Kantian assumption that "self-interest and social antagonism could help bring perpetual peace closer to be absurd and harmful."[544] Gianni Vattimo's book *After Christianity* (2002) includes a chapter, titled "Christianity or the West," which reflects on the significance of Novalis' text in relation to contemporary debates about the continued relevance of religion in the context of the twenty-first century. Vattimo argues that *Die Christenheit oder Europa* is neither an attempt to restore a sacred cosmopolitan community that existed once upon a time, nor does it suggest that Europe rejects Christianity in favor of the modern, secular state. Rather, Vattimo understands the "oder" [or] in Novalis' title to be synthetic, one in which Christianity and Europe are viewed as a "synonymous identity": "What, then, is the meaning in the title of the equivalence, if not the synonymous identity, of the West and Christianity. Indeed, the 'or' immediately excludes another meaning that could be given to the use of the particle, which in part is identical: what we are talking about is a synonymous relation rather than an alternative one."[545] By reading the "or" in Novalis' text as an "equivalence," Vattimo views Christianity as a common denominator linking European nations. Moreover, he understands the basic premise of Novalis' text to present a form of social cohesion that does not need to reference national borders, giving religion a more explicitly political function. However, neither

[543] Kleingeld, Pauline. "Romantic Cosmopolitanism: Novalis's 'Christianity or Europe.'" *Journal of the History of Philosophy; Baltimore*, vol. 46, no. 2, Apr. 2008, pp. 269–84.
[544] Ibid.
[545] Vattimo, Gianni. *After Christianity*. Columbia University Press, 2002, p. 70.

Vattimo nor Kleingeld situate *Die Christenheit oder Europa* within the theological background of the fragment controversy. Whereas Vattimo uses Novalis' text to reflect on his broader interest in the hermeneutic afterlife of Christianity (i.e. modernity's ceaseless desire to make sense of its own religious past[546]), Kleingeld limits her investigation to the question of cosmopolitanism. Therefore, both commentators overlook the many ways in which the work was in conversation with Lessing's philosophy of religion.

My reading of *Die Christenheit oder Europa* situates it in this post-fragment controversy context and compares the work (primarily) to Lessing's *Erziehung* in order to show the continuities and discontinuities between these works. Specifically, I understand *Die Christenheit oder Europa* as an attempt to provide Lessing's theory of the "new eternal gospel" with a vivid representation. According to Lessing's *Erziehung*, human reason requires vivid representations, or "anschauliche Erkenntnisse" [intuitive cognitions], whenever it finds itself in a state of "immaturity," wherein reason cannot arrive at general truth claims autonomously, but instead commissions the help of precepts, intuitions, and sensible forms in order to grasp them. Because Lessing's new eternal gospel announces the start of a more advanced stage in mankind's religious consciousness—one in which the authority of religion draws its legitimacy from the spirit rather than letter of religion—its truth remains somewhat alien to reason; specifically, the idea that salvation can be understood

[546] Vattimo understands the Christian idea of salvation and the practice of hermeneutics to be inextricably linked, a view that he develops across several of works. In *The Future of Religion*, for example, he writes: "Hermeneutics has been the friendliest philosophy toward religion because of its critique of the idea of truth as conformity between propositions and objects. From the point of view of the return of religiosity, the prominence of hermeneutics in contemporary culture seems to indicate, much more than in any previous epoch, that the road to salvation does not pass through description and knowledge but through interpretation and edification." Rorty, Richard and Gianni Vattimo, *The Future of Religion*. Edited by Santiago Zabala, Columbia University Press, 2005, p. 13. Vattimo makes a similar claim in his book *Belief*: "to believe in salvation will not mean adhering to the letter of everything that is written in the Gospel and in the dogmatic teaching of the Church, but rather in trying to understand the meaning of the evangelical text for me, here, now." Vattimo, Gianni. *Belief*. Stanford University Press, 1999, p. 66.

as a lived experience rather than as a reward redeemable in an unknown future. It is, of course, not imperative to read *Die Christenheit oder Europa* alongside Lessing's *Erziehung*, for the text also represents, as Kleingeld suggests, a convergent zone of Novalis' own broader philosophical commitments. For instance, I understand *Die Christenheit oder Europa* as staging Novalis' theory of a "geistige Gegenwart" [spiritual present], which, as discussed in the first section of this chapter, seeks to combine mnemonic and prophetic modes of thought into symbols that can serve as regulative ideals. Novalis' text could also be contrasted with other works of Lessing such as his *Das Testament Johannis*, which advocates for a dematerialization (i.e. emptying it of all ornament) or demythologization of religion by reducing the message of the Gospel of John to the pragmatic words "little children love one another" (i.e. Christian caritas). Against this demythologizing process, Novalis writes: "Die Christenheit muß wieder lebendig und wirksam werden, und sich wieder ein[e] sichtbare Kirche ohne Rücksicht auf Landesgränzen bilden, die alle nach dem Überirdischen durstige Seelen in ihren Schooß aufnimmt und gern Vermittlerin, der alten und neuen Welt wird"[547] [Christendom must again become lively and effective, and again form a visible church without regard to national borders, one which will take up into its bosom all those souls who thirst for the supernatural, and gladly become the mediator between the old world and the new]. Novalis' demand to *see* religion, and to see it without reference to national borders, returns this inquiry back its initial point of departure by conjuring up the figure of Doubting Thomas, who required visual proof of the supernatural to become a member of the community of believers. At the center of this passage stands the question of mediation [vermitteln] and how a "visible church" can serve as a mediator for a distinctly modern form of faith, or a form of faith

[547] Novalis. *Werke, Tagebücher und Briefe Friedrich von Hardenbergs*. Hrsg. von Hans-Joachim Mähl und Richard Samuel. Carl Hanser Verlag: München, 2005. Band II, p. 750.

that has undergone what Novalis describes as a "second reformation." Lessing's *Ernst und Falk,* which privileges the essence of Freemasonry (i.e. its status as an "invisible church" dwelling within human nature) as opposed to its ontological or institutional manifestations in a physical space,[548] offers another occasion for comparison. In this case, the two speakers discuss the cosmopolitan potential of freemasonry,[549] which must have been a source of inspiration for Novalis' *Christenheit oder Europa*, which views religion as an alternative form of social cohesion.

Above all, *Die Christenheit oder Europa* decidedly breaks with the underlying premise of Lessing's *Erziehung*, which is that history unfolds along a progressive continuum. Novalis challenges this premise by developing a counter-image of history, one that uses the myth of Sisyphus to show the inability of Europe to transcend a circularity that he attributes to the Protestant Reformation and French Revolution:

> Ruhig und unbefangen betrachte der ächte Beobachter die neuen staatsumwälzenden Zeiten. Kommt ihm der Staatsumwälzer nicht wie Sisyphus vor? Jetzt hat er die Spitze des Gleichgewichts erreicht und schon rollt die mächtige Last auf der andern Seite wieder herunter. Sie wird nie oben bleiben, wenn nicht eine Anziehung gegen den Himmel sie auf der Höhe schwebend erhält. Alle eure Stützen sind zu schwach, wenn euer Staat die Tendenz nach der Erde behält, aber

[548] Lessing begins *Ernst und Falk* with a "preface by a third party," which states: "Wenn nachstehende Blätter die wahre *Ontologie* der Freimäurerei nicht enthalten: so wäre ich begierig zu erfahren, in welcher von den unzähligen Schriften, die sie veranlaßt hat, ein mehr bestimmter Begriff von ihrer *Wesenheit* gegeben werde" [If the following pages do not contain the true *ontology* of Freemasonry, I would very much like to know in which of the countless writings inspired by it a more precise definition of its *essential nature* is provided]. Lessing, Gotthold Ephraim. *Werke in drei Bänden*. Bd. III. Deutsche Taschenbuch Verlag, München, 2003, p. 599.

[549] At the start of their second dialogue, Ernst and Falk have the following exchange (Ibid., p. 606):

> Falk: Ordnung muß also doch auch ohne Regierung bestehen können.
> Ernst: Wenn jedes einzelne sich selbst zu regieren weiß: Warum nicht?
> Falk: Ob es wohl auch einmal mit den Menschen dahin kommen wird?
> [Falk: It must be possible for order to exist without a government.
> Ernst: If every individual knows how to govern himself, why not?
> Falk: I wonder whether human beings will ever reach that stage?].

> knüpft ihn durch eine höhere Sehnsucht an die Höhen des Himmels, gebt ihm eine Beziehung auf das Weltall, dann habt ihr eine nie ermüdende Feder in ihm, und werdet eure Bemühungen reichlich gelohnt sehn. An die Geschichte verweise ich euch, forscht in ihrem belehrenden Zusammenhang, nach ähnlichen Zeitpunkten, und lernt den Zauberstab der Analogie gebrauchen.[550]
>
> [Let the genuine observer contemplate the new revolutionary times calmly and without prejudice. Does not the revolutionary seem to him like Sisyphus? Now he has reached the zenith of his equilibrium and already the mighty burden is rolling down again on the other side. It will never stay up unless a force attracting it toward heaven keeps it balanced at the highest point. All your props are too weak if your state still tends toward the earth, but bind it by a higher longing to the heavenly heights and give it a connection to the universe, then you will never have a slackening spring within it and you will see your efforts richly rewarded. I direct your attention to history, search in its instructive context for similar moments, and learn to use the magic wand of analogy.]

Of interest to this study is how *Die Christenheit oder Europa* synthesizes the human and the divine not by manipulating the letter of religion—an approach that corresponds more with Neologie and the poetic methodology of Klopstock's *Messias*—but rather by interpreting the spirit of religious history. To my mind, Novalis' analogical interpretation of religious history is unthinkable without Lessing's reorientation of Protestantism around the spirit of religion. On the one hand, making the spirit of history the privileged site of interpretation presents the obvious danger of not reading history for what it "*is*" (i.e. in its *literal sense* of being a record of events filtered through different modes of historical narration[551]), but rather for what it *ought to be*. In this sense, Novalis' criticism of Luther could ironically be turned around on him. According to

[550] Novalis. *Werke, Tagebücher und Briefe Friedrich von Hardenbergs*. Hrsg. von Hans-Joachim Mähl und Richard Samuel. Carl Hanser Verlag: München, 2005. Band II, p. 743.

[551] Here I have in mind the three historical modes of representation as described by Hayden White. One problem that White's research identifies is that the assumption that history can objectively represent what "is," is itself a form of ideology since narratological modes of historiography always idealize, poeticize, and aestheticize the events they purport to represent. See White, Hayden. *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990.

Novalis, Luther "behandelte das Christenthum überhaupt willkührlich, verkannte seinen Geist, und führte einen andern Buchstaben und eine andere Religion ein, nehmlich die heilige Allgemeingültigkeit der Bibel"[552] [treated Christianity altogether as he pleased, mistook its spirit and introduced another letter and another religion, namely the holy universal validity of the bible]. One can rightfully ask, however, whether or not Novalis, by asserting the "holy universal validity" of spirit, simply exchanges the normativity of the letter for the normativity of spirit. On the other hand, Novalis' relationship to historical analogy seeks to restore something very fundamental to the Christian tradition that was imperiled by Lessing's *Beweis* essay, namely, its ability to transcend the particular and establish a bond with the universal. The root word "*trans*" features heavily in Christian thought, as marked by concepts like *trans*cendence, *trans*ubstantiation, *trans*figuration. Poetry and fantasy, thus, become instruments for *revealing* new configurations of the divine and the human that promise to transcend a politically polarized social field—to move beyond the "or" of *Die Christenheit oder Europa*.

My simple thesis is that Novalis' *Die Christenheit oder Europa* advances Lessing's theology by developing dream images and symbols in a mythico-historical narrative that attempts to mediate the idea of the new eternal gospel so that Europeans can access its underlying cosmopolitian ideal and seek to realize it. At the same time, however, Novalis seeks to correct an idea embedded in Lessing's *Erziehung* that assumes modern faith involves an inwardness and immateriality that holds outward manifestations of spiritual life as ancillary at best, and superstitious at worst. The more fundamental question at stake, especially in view of similar Romantic projects like Hegel's *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, is *how* Novalis makes the spirit of

[552] Novalis. *Werke, Tagebücher und Briefe Friedrich von Hardenbergs*. Hrsg. von Hans-Joachim Mähl und Richard Samuel. Carl Hanser Verlag: München, 2005. Band II, p. 737.

religion legible. To answer this question, I apply a materialist approach to *Die Christenheit oder Europa* that understands its vivid representations according to what W.J.T. Mitchell describes in his book *Iconology: Image, Text and Ideology* as "mental images," which are a species of images that include "dreams, memories, ideas, and fantasmata."[553] My analysis of *Die Christenheit oder Europa* is also informed by the work of Brigit Meyer and others, who call for a materialist approach to the study of religion, which should not be misunderstood as "a critique of religion in the name of sheer matter, but rather a critique of the study of religion from within that advocates coming to terms with materiality as part of the study of religion."[554] Meyer argues that the purpose of this methodology is "not to unmask religion and entities such as God, gods, and spirits as fictitious illusions, but to cast doubt on the very distinction between fiction and fact—or illusion and reality—on which such unmasking rests and instead concentrate on the material manifestation of religion—its Gestalt—in the world."[555] Laying importance on the material manifestation of religion is one of the central concerns of Novalis' text, which postulates that Christianity appears in three forms: "Das Christenthum ist dreifacher Gestalt […] Eine [ist] das Mittlerthum überhaupt, als Glaube an die Allfähigkeit alles Irdischen, Wein und Brod des ewigen Lebens zu seyn"[556] [Christianity has three forms […] One is the notion of mediation itself, namely faith in the omnipotence of all earthly things to be the bread and wine of eternal life]. Thus, a materialist approach investigates religious phenomena that includes practices, objects, (mental) images, texts,

[553] Mitchell, W. J. T. *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology*. University of Chicago Press, 1987. p. 10f.
[554] Meyer, Brigit. Inaugural Lecture: "Around Birgit Meyer's Mediation and the Genesis of Presence: Toward a Material Approach to Religion." *Religion and Society*, vol. 5, 2014, p. 206.
[555] Ibid., p. 206.
[556] Novalis. *Werke, Tagebücher und Briefe Friedrich von Hardenbergs*. Hrsg. von Hans-Joachim Mähl und Richard Samuel. Carl Hanser Verlag: München, 2005. Band II, p. 749. The other forms include the following: "eine ist das Zeugungselement der Religion, als Freude an aller Religion […] Eine der Glaube an Christus, seine Mutter und die Heiligen" [one is the generative element of religion, namely, joy in all religion […] One is the faith in Christ, his mother and the saints].

and other forms of media that seek to make religion present.

The first image that readers of *Die Christenheit oder Europa* encounter is that of a medieval Europe unified by the extensive reach of the Catholic church. Novalis' descriptions underscore the importance of sensible forms of mediation in religious practices, which range from olfactory stimulation generated from the burning of incense, to music, pictures, and monuments:

> Mit welcher Heiterkeit verließ man die schönen Versammlungen in den geheimnisvollen Kirchen, die mit ermunternden Bildern geschmückt, mit süßen Düften erfüllt, und von heiliger erhebender Musik belebt waren. In ihnen wurden die geweihten Reste ehemaliger gottesfürchtiger Menschen dankbar, in köstlichen Behältnissen aufbewahrt.–und an ihnen offenbahrte sich die göttliche Güte und Allmacht, die mächtige Wohlthätigkeit dieser glücklichen Frommen, durch herrliche Wunder und Zeichen. So bewahren liebende Seelen, Locken oder Schriftzüge ihrer verstorbenen Geliebten, und nähren die süße Glut damit, bis an den wiedervereinigenden Tod. Man sammelte mit inniger Sorgfalt überall was diesen geliebten Seelen angehört hatte, und jeder pries sich glücklich der eine so tröstliche Reliquie erhalten oder nur berühren konnte. Hin und wieder schien sich die himmlische Gnade vorzüglich auf ein seltsames Bild, oder einen Grabhügel niedergelassen zu haben.[557]
>
> [With what serenity one left beautiful gatherings in mysterious churches decorated with inspiring pictures, filled with sweet scents and enlivened by uplifting sacred music. There the sanctified remains of once God-fearing people were gratefully preserved in precious vessels. And there divine goodness and omnipotence and the mighty benevolence of these happy devout ones were revealed in splendid miracles and signs. Thus loving souls preserve locks of hair or the writing of their departed loved ones, and nourish their sweet ardor with these until death reunites them. Objects which had belonged to these beloved souls were collected with devoted care, and those who possessed such a consoling relic or even could only touch it held themselves fortunate. Now and then heavenly grace seemed to have been specially bestowed on a strange picture or a grave-mound.]

While the idyllic image of a medieval Christian world deceptively overlooks the harsher realities that doubtless existed, it also imagines a world in which accessing the underlying ethos of religion or its spirit—the "goodness, omnipotence, and benevolence of the divine"—requires

[557] Ibid., p. 733.

miracles and signs and, more importantly, that the phenomenal world plays an essential role in mediating spririt. Traces of these miracles and signs inhere in the phenomena described in the passage, which affords religious subjects "Heiterkeit," or a kind of serene edification that Novalis ultimately wants to repurpose as a means of fulfilling the wish of a new cosmopolitan Europe. In contrast to Lessing, Novalis *expands* the significance of worldly phenomena as a means of making the spirit of religion legible, rather than diminishing its significance by imagining a rationally "mature" system of faith that no longer needs to reference such phenomena. Yet similar to Lessing, the passage suggests that the concept of spirit can no longer be contained solely within the bible. Rather, for Novalis (and many of his contemporaries[558]), the spirit of religion moves outward by becoming visible in nature and aestheticized objects. At the same time, the concept of spirit also moves inward to human thoughts and feelings that wish to be raised to the level of consciousness by producing a new letter. Thus "spirit" begins to be revealed through manifold forms that include

[558] I have already mentioned Hegel's *Phenomenologie des Geistes* in this context, but Kant's concept of spirit in § 49 of his *Kritik der Urteilskraft* can also be of interest, to the extent that Fichte builds on it in his lectures *Über den Unterschied des Geistes und Buchstabs in der Philosophie*. Kant defines the concept of spirit aesthetically in the following passage: "Was ist denn das, was man hier unter Geist versteht? *Geist*, in ästhetischer Bedeutung, heißt das belebende Prinzip im Gemüte" [What is it then that is meant here by "spirit"? *Spirit*, in an aesthetic significance, means the animating principle in the mind. Kant, Immanuel. *Kritik der Urteilskraft.* Hrsg. Wilhelm Weischedel. Suhrkamp. Frankfurt am Main, 1974, p. 249. Fichte, who further articulates the Kantian definition, argues that the "Geist überhaupt, oder die produktive Einbildungskraft läßt sich demnach beschreiben als ein *Vermögen Gefühle zum Bewußtseyn zu erheben*" [Spirit as such or the productive imagination can thus be described as a capacity for raising feelings to the level of consciousness]. For Fichte, spirit becomes connected to the productive imagination and it is responsible for externalizing the immanent, self-activity of the "I" into mutually serviceable representations (i.e. Buchstaben/letters) that can inspire others to develop new and original representations of their own. In Fichte's words: "unmittelbar können Geister nicht aufeinander wirken: geister sind frei, u. können nicht bestimmt *werden*, sondern müßen nach Vorgabe irend einer Erscheinung in der Sinnenwelt *sich selbst* bestimmen" [Spirits are unable to affect each other immediately. They are free and cannot *be* determined; instead, they have to determine *themselves* according to the example of some appearance in the material world]. Fichte, Johann Gottlieb, *Von den Pflichten der Gelehrten: Jenaer Vorlesungen 1794/95*, hrsg. von Reinhard Lauth, Hans Jacob, Peter K. Schneider, Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1971, pp. 57–88.

secular literature, thereby marking a moment in the history of Early German Romanticism when aesthetic and religious experience begin to cross-pollinate more explicitly.[559] For instance, in *Die Christenheit oder Europa* the creative will of the artist and the divine will start to overlap at a moment prior to any outward mediation: "Eine gewaltige Ahndung der schöpferischen Willkühr, der Grenzenlosigkeit, der unendlichen Mannigfaltigkeit, der heiligen Eigenthümlichkiet und der Allfähigkeit der innern Menschheit scheint überall rege zu warden"[560] [Everywhere there seems to be stirring a mighty sense of creative will, of limitlessness, of infinite diversity, of holy particularity, and the infinite capacity of the human spirit]. This moment prior to outward mediation presupposes that spirit has infinite freedom, which is here understood as a point of contact between the human and the divine. However, Novalis argues that not every historical epoch allows for such freedom.

Die Christenheit oder Europa maintains an antagonistic stance towards the Reformation both for its role in causing Europe to fragment into discrete nations and for its role in curbing "the infinite capacity of the human spirit." Thus, the Reformation functions as a counter-image to the

[559] The merging of religious and aesthetic experience is perhaps best captured in Wackenroder's *Herzensergießungen eines kunstliebenden Klosterbruders*, which in the story of Joseph Berglinger describes how Church music occasions both a religious and aesthetic experience in the protagonist: "Erwartungsvoll harrte er auf den ersten Ton der Instrumente;—und indem er nun aus der dumpfen Stille, mächtig und langgezogen, gleich dem Wehen eines Windes vom Himmel hervorbrach und die ganze Gewalt der Töne über seinem Haupte daherzog—da war es ihm, als wenn auf einmal seiner Seele große Flügel ausgespannt, als wenn er von einer dürren Heide aufgehoben würde, der trübe Wolkenvorhang vor den sterblichen Augen verschwände und er zum lichten Himmel emporschwebte" [Expectantly, he would await the first sound of the instruments—and when it came bursting forth, mighty and sustained, shattering the dull silence like a storm from Heaven, and when the sounds swept over his head in all their grandeur—then he felt as if his soul had suddenly spread great wings as if he were rising up from a desolate heath, as if the curtain of dark clouds were dissolving before his mortal gaze, and he were soaring up to the radiant Heavens]. Wackenroder, Wilhelm Heinrich. *Herzensergiessungen eines kunstliebenden Klosterbruders*. P. Reclam, 1964. p. 99. Translation mine.

[560] Novalis. *Werke, Tagebücher und Briefe Friedrich von Hardenbergs*. Hrsg. von Hans-Joachim Mähl und Richard Samuel. Carl Hanser Verlag: München, 2005. Band II, p. 745

utopic cosmopolitanism of the medieval world and Novalis links the emergence of these nations to the emergence of opposing religious sects, calling it the "nothwendig Resultat"[561] of the Reformation. According to Novalis, it was the reformers, or "Insurgenten" [insurgents] as he calls them, whose love of the letter (philology) "trennten das Untrennbare, theilten die unteilbare Kirche"[562] [separated what could not be separated and divided the undividable Church]. Luther used the letter of religion to break with the traditions of the Catholic Church, but in so doing he paved the way for a "despotischer Buchstaben" [even more despotic letter] to sit on the empty throne. Because the bible wielded so much authority for the Reformation, understanding every letter in its margin became the new norm for Protestant theologians, who allowed philology to become the center of the religious universe, even at the expense of the many other ways of mediating religious experience that Novalis previously catalogued. In his final analysis, Novalis claims that philology was "dem religiöse […] höchst verderblich"[563] [highly damaging to the religious sense] because it claimed a monopoly on religious mediation and dismissed other "earthly things" from acting as mediators, thereby anesthetizing Europe's "sense" for religion. "Die Geschichte des Protestantismus," Novalis laments, "zeigt uns […] keine herrlichen großen Erscheinungen des Überirdischen mehr[564]" [The history of Protestantism no longer shows us splendid visions of the supernatural]. Novalis' observation about the primacy of the letter during the Reformation can also be observed in the artworks of that time. To mention just one, Lucas Cranach the Elder's *Heavenly Ladder of St. Bonaventure* (1515) depicts St. Bonaventure's spiritual

[561] Ibid., p. 736.
[562] Ibid., p. 736.
[563] Ibid., p. 736.
[564] Ibid., p. 738.

exercise, or ascent, into heaven through an image that is completely overwhelmed by (instructive) words, as if the image itself were incapable of communicating without the aid of the letter (figure 3).[565] In the aftermath of the Reformation, things only got worse for the religious sense. Novalis describes how enlightenment philosophy took the Reformation's fetishization of the letter to new extremes. Consequently, enlightenment philosophy started to view religion as its enemy because, after running the letter of religion through its "ungeheure Mühle"[566] [monstrous mill], many Aufklärer judged the contents of the bible to be indelibly superstitious: "Duckte sich ja irgendwo ein alter Aberglaube an eine höhe Welt und sonst auf, so wurde gleich von alle Seiten Lärm geblasen, und wo möglich der gefährliche Funke durch Philosophie und Witz in der Asche erstickt; dennoch war Toleranz das Losungswort der Gebildeten"[567] [If somewhere an old superstitious

[565] For an account of the relationship between words and images in reformation artworks, see Koerner, Joseph Leo. *The Reformation of the Image*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008.
[566] Novalis. *Werke, Tagebücher und Briefe Friedrich von Hardenbergs*. Hrsg. von Hans-Joachim Mähl und Richard Samuel. Carl Hanser Verlag: München, 2005. Band II, p. 741.
[567] Ibid., p. 742.

Figure 3: Lucas Cranach the Elder's *Heavenly Ladder of St. Bonaventure* (1510-1515)

belief in a higher world reared its head, the alarm was sounded at once on all sides, and whenever possible the dangerous spark was suffocated in the ashes by philosophy and wit; and yet tolerance was the slogan of the educated]. According to Novalis, modern philology, which had been adopted by eighteenth century Protestant theology, caused the enlightenment–in Marcusian fashion–to

betray its own policy on tolerance.[568] He claims that "Haß gegen den Katholischen Glauben ging allmähig in Haß gegen die Bibel, gegen den christlichen Glauben und endlich gar gegen die Religion über[569] [hatred of the Catholic faith gradually turned into hatred of the Bible, of the Christian faith, and finally even of all religion]. Thus, "Wissen und Glauben [traten] in eine entschiedenere Opposition"[570] [knowledge and faith moved into more decisive opposition]. This polarization of faith and knowledge paved the way for the enlightenment's campaign against religious superstition, which did not just stop at religion, but extended to "alle Gegenstände des Enthusiasmus […], Fantasie und Gefühl, Sittlichkeit und Kunstliebe, Zukunft und Vorzeit"[571] [all objects of enthusiasm: imagination and feeling, rectitude and love of art, future and past]. During the eighteenth century, Novalis argues, enthusiasm was only permitted in a sublimated form: "Ein Enthusiasmus ward großmüthig dem armen Menschengeschlechte übrig gelassen und als Prüfstein der höchsten Bildung jedem Actionair derselben unentbehrlich gemacht. Der Enthusiasmus für diese herrliche, gorßartige Philosophie und insbesondere für ihre Priester und Mystagogen"[572] [One enthusiasm was generously left for the poor human race and made indispensable as a touchstone of the highest education for every practitioner of it. It was enthusiasm for this splendid, magnificent philosophy]. Against this process of spiritual disenchantment Novalis levels his counter-image of medieval history, which indexes a moment in time when objects of enthusiasm could freely mediate religious experience without fearing persecution.

In many ways *Die Christenheit oder Europa* serves as a kind of reeducation treatise that

[568] In his essay on "Repressive Tolerance," Marcuse writes: "[…] what is proclaimed and practiced as tolerance today, is in many of its most effective manifestations serving the cause of oppression" in Wolff, Robert Paul. *A Critique of Pure Tolerance*. Beacon Press, 1965. p. 81.
[569] Ibid., p. 741.
[570] Ibid., p. 740.
[571] Ibid., p. 741.
[572] Ibid., p. 741.

accords history the task of restoring value and confidence to sensible forms of mediation like the "music, relics, locks of hair, incense, and monuments" described above. As far as Novalis is concerned, his narrative about the medieval world should have an alienating effect on modern (Protestant) readers, who have been trained to view these more "archaic" forms of mediation as superfluous, instead regarding the letter of religion to be the sole legitimate source of religious experience. During the modern age, Novalis writes, "man suchte der alten Religion einen neuern vernünftigen, gemeinern Sinn zu geben, indem man alles Wunderbare und Geheimnißvolle sorgfältig von ihr abwusch"[573] [an attempt was made to give the old religion a newer, rational, more common meaning, by carefully washing away from it all the wonder and mystery]. And yet for Novalis, the rational content of the letter alone is not adequate for sustaining modern religious belief; it requires the very myths that enlightenment theology dispensed with and he turns to the spirit of history and the phenomenal world to reenchant Christianity. With respect to history, Novalis does not want Lessing's insights about the limited function of historical truth in matters of faith to be misunderstood. He writes: "alle Gelehrsamkeit ward aufgeboten um die Zuflucht zur Geschichte abzuschneiden, indem man die Geschichte zu einem häuslichen und bürgerlichen Sitten—und Familien—Gemählde zu veredeln sich bemühte"[574] [That all available learning was summoned to cut off the flight to history, while it was attempted to refine history so that it might become a portrait of domestic and bourgeois moral and family life]. That the enlightenment learned how to "cut off the flight to history" alludes to Lessing's *Beweis* essay, which, as we have seen, demonstrates that the binding force of religion cannot simply be a matter of verifying the historical truth of the miracles and prophecies recorded in the bible. However, this in no way suggests that

[573] Ibid., p. 744.
[574] Ibid., p. 742.

history is powerless at facilitating religious conviction; for historical narration (i.e. the world created through the act of storytelling) still possesses the capacity to ignite the "electric spark" that Lessing speaks of, but that spark can only be achieved by allowing oneself to be pulled into the story. Moreover, history should not appear as a familiar "portrait" of modern bourgeois life; rather, it should estrange us from that image and show us alternative configurations of spiritual and social life. According to Novalis, the point is not to assimilate historical representations to the present moment but rather "zu studieren [ihr], ihr nachzugehn, von ihr zu lernen, mit ihr gleichen Schritt zu halten, gläubig ihren Verheißungen und Winken zu folgen—daran denkt keiner"[575] [To study it, follow it, learn from it, keep in step with it, faithfully obeying its promises and its guidance—no one thinks of that].

In the end, *Die Christenheit oder Europa* provokes the skeptical reader to reconsider the sources of their skepticism. To achieve this, the text asks modernity to entertain the standpoint of the believer in order to rekindle the "sense of religion" that has been forgotten since the Reformation. By recollecting this sense—albeit in a manner that corresponds more closely to the fairy tale than an archaeological excavation of empirical facts—Novalis imagines a critique of the enlightenment to be possible and hopes that a rebirth of religion will emerge. He argues, "Erst durch genauere Kenntniß der Religion wird man jene fürchterlichen Erzeugnisse eines Religionsschlafs, jene Träume und Deliria des heiligen Organs besser beurtheilen und dann erst die Wichtigkeit enes Geschenks recht einsehn lernen"[576] [Only through closer familiarity with religion will one be better able to judge those fearful products of the sleep of religion, those dreams and deliriums of the holy instrument, and then for the first time to learn true insight into the

[575] Ibid., p. 744.
[576] Ibid., p. 746.

importance of that gift]. The "holy instrument" or human mind that archives both the myths of religion and the myths of enlightenment equally comes to be seen by Novalis as "der Herzschlag der neuen Zeit" [the heartbeat of the new age], which promises to secure peace both within the individual and the state. Thus, Novalis' excursion into the annals of history yields a symbol of reconciliation that (however precarious and untenable) unifies reason and imagination; the material and immaterial; the past and future. *Die Christenheit oder Europa* prophecies: "eine große Versöhnungzeit, [in der] ein Heiland, der wie ein ächter Genius under den Menschen einheimisch, nur geglaubt nicht gesehen werden [kann], und unter zahllosen Gestalten den Gläubigen sichtbar, als Brod und Wein verzehrt"[577] [a great time of reconciliation, in which a savior who like a true genius will be at home among men, who can only be believed in and not seen, and who is visible to the faithful in countless forms, consumed as bread and wine]. The "savior" who merges with the genius, and who can only be believed in yet remains unseen, returns modern faith to the figure of Doubting Thomas, but here Novalis reads tremendous value into the situation (of not knowing), which provides the "holy instrument" with innumerable ways to (re)shape and (re)generate religious experience so that it possesses real practical import.

[577] Ibid., p. 745.

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